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EDITED BY J. L. CRANMER-BYNG, M.C.

A TAOIST NOTEBOOK

*By the Same Author*

A CONFUCIAN NOTEBOOK

# A Taoist Notebook

By  
EDWARD HERBERT



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## EDITORIAL NOTE

*THE* object of the Editor of this series is a very definite one. He desires above all things that these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will between East and West. He hopes that they will contribute to a fuller knowledge of the great cultural heritage of the East, for only through real understanding will the West be able to appreciate the underlying problems and aspirations of Asia to-day. He is confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Eastern thought will help to a revival of that true spirit of charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour.

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FOREWORD

THIS delightful collection of "Notes" (really very short essays) contains more meat than the title would suggest. They are the result of very wide reading and mature observations on some of the vital points in Taoist philosophy. Particularly interesting are the references to connections with the other schools.

LIN YUTANG.

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TO  
EDGAR E. BLUETT  
AND  
LEONARD B. BLUETT

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## PREFACE

IN this companion volume to *A Confucian Notebook* the author has attempted by the same method (that of the short essay or "Note" on points of special significance or interest) to register something of the spirit and substance of that compound of mystical speculation and apparatus of trance, which is genuine Taoism, the rival of the Confucian and other schemes of living of the "Hundred Schools". It is this Taoism only—the philosophy, not the cult—that is dealt with in the following pages; the classical corpus of pure and applied thought as distinct from post-classical corruptions. The subject, like Great Tao itself, is in some of its aspects shadowy and dim; but of Taoism it may be truly said that "its words have an ancestor, its actions a lord", and in focusing attention, as he has endeavoured to do, on certain key-points of the system, the author hopes to have communicated a sense of the single underlying principle that unites them.

His thanks are due to Dr. A. C. Graham, Lecturer in Chinese Philosophy at London University, for putting at his disposal valuable data on the subject of Neo-Confucian thought.



# TABLE OF NAMES AND DATES

SCHOOL	PHILOSOPHERS	WORKS OF THE SCHOOL
TAOIST	<p>LAO TAN (LAO Tzŭ) : traditional birth-date 604 B.C. Reputed author of <i>Tao Tzŭ Ching</i></p> <p>CHUANG CHOU (CHUANG Tzŭ) : died about 275 B.C.</p> <p>LIEN YŪ-K'OU (LIEN Tzŭ) : (?) 4th century B.C. Identity and connection with <i>Book of Lieh Tzŭ</i> obscure</p> <p>YANG CHU : near contemporary of Mencius. Representative of Individualism</p> <p>LIU AN (HUAI-NAN Tzŭ) : died 122 B.C. Exponent of Taoism with admixture of Confucian ideas</p>	<p><i>Tao Tzŭ Ching</i></p> <p><i>Book of Chuang Tzŭ</i></p> <p><i>Book of Lieh Tzŭ</i></p> <p><i>Book of Lieh Tzŭ</i>, Chap. VII; philosophy of Yang Chu</p> <p><i>Book of Huai-nan Tzŭ</i></p>
CONFUCIAN	<p>K'UNG FU-TZŪ (CONFUCIUS) : 551-479 B.C. "The Master"</p> <p>TS'ING SHŪN (TS'ING Tzŭ) : dates unknown. Scholar-disciple of Confucius. Traditionally connected with authorship of <i>Great Learning</i> and <i>Book of Filial Piety</i></p> <p>K'UNG CH'Ī (Tzŭ Ssŭ) : born about 490 B.C. Grandson of Confucius. Traditionally connected with authorship of <i>Doctrine of the Mean</i> and <i>Great Learning</i></p> <p>MĒNG Tzŭ (MENCIOUS) : 372-289 B.C. "The Second Sage"</p> <p>HsŪN CH'ING (HsŪN Tzŭ) : died about 235 B.C.</p>	<p>THE FIVE CLASSICS :—</p> <p><i>Book of History</i></p> <p><i>Book of Poetry</i></p> <p><i>Book of Rites</i></p> <p><i>Book of Changes</i></p> <p><i>Spring and Autumn</i> (<i>Annals of Lu</i>)</p> <p>THE FOUR BOOKS :—</p> <p><i>Confucian Analects</i></p> <p><i>Great Learning</i></p> <p><i>Doctrine of the Mean</i></p> <p><i>Book of Mencius</i></p> <p><i>Book of Filial Piety</i></p> <p><i>Book of Hsŭn Tzŭ</i></p>

# TABLE OF NAMES AND DATES

(continued)

SCHOOL	PHILOSOPHERS	WORKS OF THE SCHOOL
MOHIST	Mo Ti (Mo Tzŭ) : about 480-400 B.C.	<i>Book of Mo Tzŭ</i>
LEGALIST	HAN FEI (HAN FEI Tzŭ) : died 233 B.C. Representative of Realism with Taoist affinities	<i>Book of Kuan Tzŭ</i> : anonymous work of 3rd century B.C. (some parts older), written around Kuan Chung, statesman of 7th cen- tury B.C. <i>Book of Lord Shang</i> : anonymous work of late 3rd century B.C., written around Shang Yang, statesman of 4th century B.C. <i>Book of Han Fei Tzŭ</i>
SOPHIST	HUI SHIH (HUI Tzŭ) : contemporary of Chuang Tzŭ KUNG-SUN LUNG : early 3rd century B.C.	<i>Book of Kung-sun Lung</i>
NEO- CONFUCIAN	CHOU TUN-I : 1017-1073 A.D. SHAO YUNG : 1011-1077 A.D. CHANG TSAI : 1020-1077 A.D. CH'ENG HAO : 1032-1085 A.D. CH'ENG I : 1033-1107 A.D. CHU HSI : 1130-1200 A.D.	Commentaries on the Confucian Canon, metaphysical and cos- mological treatises, etc.

## I. TWO VIEWS OF THE ABSOLUTE

### (1) SUNG CONFUCIAN

It may be doubted whether the ghost of Confucius, had it revisited China in the twelfth century A.D., would have recognized in the systematization of Confucian doctrine by the Sung philosophers, the original shape and substance of that doctrine. The Sung philosophers professed to be no more than commentators and interpreters, and denied that they were creators of anything new; but the inner philosophic meanings which they claimed to have found in the ancient records, were derivative (and largely strained) meanings and in that sense were quasi-new creations. In particular the Sung deployment of a "forces theory" based on the Absolute would certainly have been for the ghostly visitant a strange, if not a startling, confrontation.

If one thing stands out clearly from the best authenticated "sayings" of Confucius, it is the acceptance by him with a serene complacency of "the tradition of the ancients" as the groundwork of his moral teaching. As the architect of a code of morals—of gentlemanly behaviour and benevolent administration—he was responsible for the foundation as well as for the superstructure; and he saw (or believed he saw) in history (or what passed for history) an ideal foundation in the example of royal sages who had reached perfection in these matters. A historical basis being thus available it was otiose, in Confucius' view, to consider providing a metaphysical one; in a highly practical world there was no real room for such airy explorations, which were much more suited, and might well be left, to the Taoists.



But the scholars of the Sung, realizing perhaps that the Taoists in their transcendental *Tao* had, in the vulgar phrase, "got something" which the Confucians so far had not, set to work to probe the subject of foundations. There could be no question of invalidating in any way the tradition of the ancients, for this was sacrosanct and the breath of life of Confucianism; but it was permissible to inquire whether behind and beyond the elaborate façade of rules for government—government of the State and self-government for the individual—there was not some central principle, deep-rooted in the very nature of things, which would account for the whole ethical scheme and identify it with absolute, as distinct from historical, truth. So fascinating was the idea of rounding off the great scheme with such a principle, that the Sung scholars felt impelled to persist with it; but they, like Confucius the Master, were avowedly "transmitters and not makers" and it was imperative to find a sanction for the idea, either expressed or implied, in the Confucian scriptures. An examination of the Four Books unfortunately yielded a negative result; but the classics of the school were less unpromising, for there, embedded in the *Book of Changes*<sup>1</sup> stiff with the antique symbolism of divination, was a reference—inconspicuous, it was true, yet plain enough for anyone to see—to *T'ai Chi*, the Supreme Ultimate or Absolute Originating Cause of all things. It was possible—it might even be assumed—that Confucius had sensed the import and implications of this reference; for was he not declared by his biographer, the celebrated historian Ssü-ma Ch'ien, to have been so keen a student of the *Changes* that he thrice wore out the leather thongs that held together the bamboo slips on which its precious

<sup>1</sup> Not in the body of the book, but in the Great Appendix to it. The traditional attribution to Confucius of the authorship of the "Ten Wings" (Appendices) of the *Book of Changes* is no longer accepted.

mysteries were inscribed? There was his allusion, too, in one version of the *Analekts* (apocryphal though it might be and of doubtful meaning) to fifty years spent in study of the *Changes* and to the efficacy of the book as a safeguard against moral error.

Having lifted the *T'ai Chi*, as it were, from the obscurity of its setting in the *Book of Changes* into the sharp light of the Neo-Confucian day, individual philosophers of the Sung school proceeded to develop the doctrine along separate lines. By Chou Tun-i, the "father" of the school, *T'ai Chi* was presented as the starting-point, which was also the finishing-point, of a cosmic process: a cyclic process of constant change, in the course of which were produced in turn the linked principles of *Yang* and *Yin* (the positive and negative expressions of *T'ai Chi*), the *Wu Hsing* or Five Elements (wood, fire, soil, metal and water) and all forms and existences in the material world, including the highest of them, man. Shao Yung, drawing freely on the *Book of Changes*, formulated evolutionary sequences of his own, but, like Chou Tun-i, posited *T'ai Chi* as the origin and end of everything. In the scheme of Chang Tsai *T'ai Chi* was replaced, as the root idea, by *T'ai Hsü*, the Great Void: the primal, the pure, state of *Ch'i*, an all-pervading vapour or breath, which under the influence of the *Yin* principle sank and contracted to fashion "the ten thousand things", and under that of the *Yang* principle rose and expanded to accomplish their dissolution.<sup>1</sup> The Ch'êng brothers likewise—Ch'êng Hao and Ch'êng I—ignored, or practically ignored, *T'ai Chi*; but in their schemes the basic concept was *Li*, a spiritual essence working in and through the *Ch'i*, that vapour or breath, to cause each one of "the ten thousand things" to be just what it was

<sup>1</sup> A curious anticipation of this theory, involving a system of symbolic numbers, is to be found in the Taoist classic, *Lieh Tzû*.

and no other than it was. In these various speculative excursions the five scholars moved independently and were feeling their way; it remained for the master-mind of Chu Hsi—steeped in learning and with a passion for Truth—to consolidate and fructify the ground they had gained.

In general, Chu Hsi approved their findings, but these needed clarifying and co-ordinating and it fell to him to display them as a connected whole. Of *Li*, the nature of each kind of thing (animate or inanimate, wrought or raw), he predicated that it was pre-existent and eternal; the *Li* of jade, for instance, already existed before there was any actual jade to take this nature. The totality of *Li*—all natures of all kinds of things—was the *Li* of "heaven and earth" (the universe at large); and this totality, which containing all was yet contained in each of the *Li*, was *T'ai Chi*, the Supreme Ultimate—the Sublime Ridge-Pole (as one might say, for *Chi* had once meant this) of the House of the *Li*. The medium in which *Li* worked was the nebulous mass of the contracting and expanding *Ch'i*; as each concrete thing emerged from the mass, it carried with it—the gift of *Li*—the peculiar nature proper to a member of its kind. The mark of *Li*, as distinct from *Ch'i*, was immateriality, the abstruseness of an idea; *Ch'i* only was creative, as were the forces attached to it—the *Yin* and *Yang*, which directed the products of *Ch'i* into corridors of "female" and "male", and the Five Elements, which gave substance and colour to the myriad objects of experience in their multiform varieties. But *Li*, although equated with *T'ai Chi*, was at the same time transcended by it; for even the nature of "heaven and earth" (the totality of *Li*) demanded a progenitor, and beyond this nature—waiting, as it were, in incredible aloofness to answer the demand—was *Wu Chi*, *T'ai Chi* in reverse, no longer the Limit but the Limitless, Infinitude itself.

It required no little philosophical skill to demonstrate that all this metaphysics and cosmology was really, and had always been, the groundwork of the venerable edifice of Confucian morality. It was simple enough to argue that the seasons, in common with other terrestrial phenomena, were derived from the interaction of the Five Elements; but to explain that the virtues<sup>1</sup> were so derived (the virtues which to Confucius and Mencius were self-explanatory and needed no derivation) it was necessary to ascribe to the Five Elements a moral as well as a material function, and to *Li* the character of a moral-material law. For the purpose of reconstituting the Great Tradition—essentially an ethical purpose—the former attribute of *Li* was the important one; the moral indeed subsumed the material, and if Chu Hsi and his "School of the Way" may be said to have had a formula for the Absolute, it was: *T'ai Chi* = *Li* = the Moral Law. They could not very well discard Shang Ti, the personal chief of the Chinese "Heaven" and prime manipulator of the moral order—his name and fame were too deeply incised on the tablets of the Confucian Classics for that—and he also was placed on a level with *Li*, though altered in guise from a super-divinity to an aspect or illustration of the Moral Law. In addition there was *T'ien*, the immemorial "Heaven", which was easier to manage as an equivalent of *Li*; for, like *Li*, it stood for the principle of nature and for the moral principle, and it did not impinge, as Shang Ti did, on the delicate problem of divine personality. And with the inclusion of these two great items in their formula (*Shang Ti* = *T'ien* = *Li*) the prescription of the Sung Confucian doctors regarding *T'ai Chi*, the Supreme Ultimate, was complete.

<sup>1</sup> Among these was *Jên* ("kindly sympathy"), the paramount virtue held by the Neo-Confucians to be the perfect manifestation of *Li*.

## (2) CLASSICAL TAOIST

To return to the hypothetical visit of the ghost of Confucius to the China of the Sung : if this had been undertaken instead by the shade of a Taoist of the classical period, the latter's reaction would have been swift and straight to the point. For the schoolmen of the Sung were debtors to Taoism, and a charge of plagiarism was the obvious one to raise ; could it have been given to a Chuang Tzū to raise it, the task of advocacy would have been performed with relish and not perhaps without the flicker of a sardonic smile.

In Neo-Confucianism there were Buddhist as well as Taoist influences and the two were interfused, yet not so deeply as to render indistinguishable such vital principles of classical Taoism as those of " stillness " and the spontaneity of *Tao*. Chou Tun-i might suppose that, in preferring stillness to kindness and justice as a hall-mark of the sage, he was merely interpreting the mind of Confucius ; but there was nothing in the recorded " sayings of the Master " to show (or suggest) that this preference was his, and Chou Tun-i could not unfairly be accused of appropriating, on behalf of his group, a Taoist speciality. Against Ch'êng Hao, who pleaded for spontaneous (that is, undeliberate, effortless) action, a similar accusation could be made ; for the theory and practice of this sort of action, both in Nature and in the life of man, was the basis—was the very meaning—of Taoist philosophy. In their Neo-Confucian setting these and other borrowings from that philosophy had a strong Buddhist, especially a *Ch'an* Buddhist,<sup>1</sup> tinge ; and on this a classical Taoist might have said that, if the " School of

<sup>1</sup> The variety of Buddhism known as *Ch'an*, with its emphasis on contemplation and naturalness in living, had close affinities with the creed of philosophic Taoism.

the Way" could not get on without resorting to Taoist ideas, it should have adhered, or tried to adhere, to the genuine and original ones as taught in the *Chuang Tzŭ Book* and the *Tao Tê Ching*.

He might have said also of that school that, in its feverish efforts to schematize the workings of the invisible world, it was guilty of a gross misuse of the faculties of the mind; that if ever there was an example of over-indulgence in "acquired" as distinct from "intuitive" knowledge, it was here in these heady speculations, this orgy of the intellect. Such theorizings, and the arguments they entailed, were always provocative and bound to be dangerous in their results; as Chuang Tzŭ had so forcefully pointed out, disputations inevitably led to disputes, and these in the absence of an infallible arbiter (and where was such a one to be found?) could only lead to confusion and chaos of thought. The followers of Chu Hsi might feel convinced that in him they had found an infallible arbiter: a final authority on the Confucian Canon, whose reinterpretation of it had an inherent and obvious rightness which could never be impugned. But even in Chu Hsi's lifetime there were learned doctors of Confucianism who dared to disagree,<sup>1</sup> and who not infrequently failed to agree among themselves—a further object-lesson in the folly of cultivating the science method and chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of the "last word".

It is not to be imagined, however, that *T'ai Chi* and its instrumentalities, which the Neo-Confucians made so much of, were excluded by the classical Taoists from their scheme of things. On the contrary, the latter revered *T'ai Chi* as the upper limit of the physical world, but higher still there was

<sup>1</sup> The scholar Lu Chiu-yŭan, for instance, who equated *Li* (Nature) with Mind. In Chu Hsi's system Mind was not *Li*, but a tenuous product of the interplay of *Li* and *Ch'i*.

something, which not being anything was yet not nothing, and this was *Tao*—the *Tao* which Chuang Tzŭ described, in the preface to a list of saints of Taoism, as “overtopping the Topmost” (that is, *T'ai Chi*). As to the Yin-Yang principle, the respective authors of the Taoist classics deployed it freely, though without attempting (like the Neo-Confucians) to make it part of an orderly cosmic plan; the famous dualism figures in these works mainly as an instrument for “harmonizing the life”, that is, bringing it to a condition of poise—a subtle balance of movement and rest—in a sort of spiritual no-man’s-land midway between all opposites, all extremes. Of the Five Elements as a “forces theory” there is in these same works hardly a trace; they emerge (or seem to emerge) in a minor classic, the diminutive *Yin Fu Ching*, but more as a conventional fivefold grouping than as an active constituent of Taoist thought.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of *Ch'i* (of the “vital breath”), which in its generalized Sung Confucian form was far-reaching as “heaven and earth”, was in Taoism centred on man’s individual life; the *Ch'i* was in fact the “power” of that life—its urge or energy, compounded of spirit and in a mysterious way of the physical breath, the conservation and replenishment of which were the object and constant concern of the good Taoist. The latter had no awareness of *Li* in the sense of a system of ideal prototypes of things; but his *Tao* had some cousinship with *Li* in that it, too, stood for the Natural Law, and like *Li* (the totality of *Li*) was present everywhere and in everything, even in the gross and repellent products of decay.

It is not always possible to determine, in disquisitions upon

<sup>1</sup> What is denominated the “Five Robbers” in this work is presumed to be a reference to the Five Elements, which “rob” one another in the sense in which Water, for example, deprives Fire of its character by quenching it.

*Tao* in the classics of Taoism, whether the argument is directed to *Tao* in its ultimate connotation as the Absolute, or to the *Tao* of Evolutionary Process or the *Tao* of Conduct. Averse by instinct (as were all Taoists) from making distinctions of any kind, the respective authors—chary perhaps of seeming to divide the indivisible *Tao*—were careful to insist on its essential oneness and not to overstress its individual aspects. But about *Tao* in its aspect of the Absolute there could be little ambiguity, for there was little to be said; there was indeed one thing only to be said, that this *Tao* was attributeless—so completely so, that even the character of nameability refused to adhere to it. One does not have to read deeply in Taoism to discover the simple process of logic by which this fundamental conclusion was reached.

On the basis that every idea presupposed and implied an opposite idea, a link, which paradoxically was also a severance, came to be established between Being and Non-being, the former denoting the Outcome, the latter the Origin. But Non-being, though "ultimate" in the sense of impinging on the void and surpassing the imaginable, was nevertheless only relatively so; though expressed as a negative, it was a state and could be named, and there still clung to it by virtue of its opposition to Being a vestige of the positive. Every difference, however, presupposed and implied a corresponding, ulterior sameness; and behind the greatest of all differences, reconciling and resolving it, was the Grand Sameness—the Sameness of the Absolute, in which Being and Non-being, in common with all other states and all attributes, were fused and unified. In the opening chapter of the *Tao Tê Ching*, in which these basic matters are dealt with, this Sameness is described as the Mystery or Mysteries; it is as though the author were trying to say that his subject had exhausted the resources of language, and that



at this point—the identity of everything—the edge and end of argument had been reached. In the *Chuang Tzŭ Book* (the twenty-fifth chapter) it is stated that, if words were adequate, it might be possible in the course of a day to elucidate the Mystery of Mysteries, but that since they were not, one could talk all day and get no further than explaining the material world. From the point of view of Taoist propaganda it was perhaps unfortunate that the Ground of Things defied, or seemed to defy, designation; yet, as it happened, there was a stopgap word which, if not a name for it, was the next best thing—*Tao*, a word of wonder and power, which originally meant “path” and had come to mean “Truth”. In the last book mentioned it is stressed that *Tao*, as a term for the Absolute, was a makeshift one: a name for the Nameless that was not a name, a clue to the Clueless, no more than that. It behoved the student of *Tao* to beware lest, through constant use of the familiar term, he should become forgetful of the Abstraction for which it stood.

There was not much hope of arousing the interest of the ordinary man in this phantom of phantoms, but for him there were symbols and he could be made to understand, for instance, what Primitive Simplicity involved, and why it was so important for a Taoist to “unshape” himself on the model of the Unwrought Block. To the adept or “sage” it was given to go beyond the mental image and to grasp the Reality, or if not to grasp, at any rate to glimpse it—from the secret window of the innermost chamber of the mind—in a mode which was neither speech nor silence.

## II. TAO THE INEFFABLE SHE

THE doctors of Taoism having found in the vocabulary of ancient and venerated Chinese terms a side-name—*Tao* or "Great Way"—for the Ground of Things, went on to apply it (as they justly could, since the Ground and its aspects were essentially one) to both the Origin (Non-being) and the Outcome (Being). In relation to the latter the term represented the principle underlying the world of actuality, the tangible world of "the ten thousand creatures" as distinct from the viewless one of the visionary and mystic. This principle, it was important to remember, was still the Incommunicable, the Nameless; but in its working it was susceptible of description by a metaphor more realistic than *Tao*—that of "Great Mother", the genetrix of "all below heaven".

In Taoist theory the familiar objects of the mundane scene, inanimate and animate, were the result of spontaneous movement in the primordial mass; a rotary movement proceeding from birth through phases of growth, maturity and decay to death, the completion of the cycle or "return to the root". From the idea of care, the care required to maintain these orderly developments in a disciplined recurrence, it was a short step to the idea of motherliness in *Tao*; and, this stage reached, it was easy to equate the *Tao* of Evolution with the Great Mother and to speak of the myriad creatures as her sons or children. But even in metaphor this Mother was only a manifestation, not a personage at all: the real presence (as it were) of the Ground, subsisting—formless yet perfect—in time and older than the antiquity of "heaven and earth". With the half-dozen qualities associated with her name in the twenty-fifth

chapter of the *Tao Tê Ching*, she emerges from the cosmic shadows as an elemental force: entirely self-sufficient for her task—the propagation and nurturing of life—yet dependent on *Tao* the Absolute for the law of her being. To her it belonged to operate that law (the law of pure spontaneity) by spontaneous production; but there was no merit in effortless activity and, stupendous though her achievement was, the Taoist must know that it was not a matter for laudation. The mood of reluctance or refusal to take credit for the work of *Tao* in any of its forms was encouraged, indeed enjoined as a point of doctrine, in the literature of Taoism; and no doubt this attitude explains in part the obscurity which surrounds the Great Mother, and the fitfulness of her appearances, in that literature. In function she closely resembled *Tê*, the impersonal essence or “virtue” of *Tao*; but *Tê* was formative rather than creative—a power which, investing each nascent thing, impelled it to follow its natural course and, in the case of man, directed him on the “Way” to sagehood.

A variation on the theme of *Tao* conceived as the Universal Mother is the even vaguer presentiment of the “Valley Spirit”, which occurs in the *Lieh Tzŭ Book* in a rhymed fragment ascribed to the Yellow Emperor,<sup>1</sup> and again in the *Tao Tê Ching* (the sixth chapter) without an ascription. So compressed is the symbolism of this brief chapter, that it is difficult to extract any clear meaning from it; it would seem, however, that the Valley Spirit was another name for the Female Principle, the *Yin* or passive element of dualist thought. In con-

<sup>1</sup> There was a persistent tradition connecting the name of Huang Ti, the legendary Yellow Emperor, with the authorship of a work (or works) on the subject of Taoism; a tradition that can be seen reflected in references by the historian Ssŭ-ma Ch'ien to Huang-Lao, the craft (or words or books) of Huang Ti and Lao Tzŭ.

trast to the bold convexity of the hills, the low-lying and hollow ground, as Taoists saw it, was a shy, receptive feature ; a deep, withdrawn collecting-place, which caught the waters from the heights and made them still. Seen thus, the valley with its womb-like character was very apt as an image of the Female Principle ; and its so-called spirit was emblematic of the quest and cult of femininity, that is, of unobtrusiveness and quiet, of being a blank<sup>1</sup> or vacancy for *Tao* to fill. But the Valley Spirit, described—supposedly by the Yellow Emperor—as “deathless”, had durability, a quality of strength ; so too, the soft transparency of a pool was strong (in the simile of Chuang Tzū) to reflect with the hard precision of a glass “the hairs of the beard and the brows” of one looking into it. The glorifying of “strength through weakness” by exaltation of the dales and deeps was typically, indeed uniquely, Taoist. In Confucianism, as Dr. Waley has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> the outlook was the opposite of this : “The gentleman”, a disciple of Confucius is recorded to have said, “abhors to dwell on low-lying ground, the sink of all the impurities under heaven.”

<sup>1</sup> That is, having the blankness of virgin timber, of the Unwrought Block.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (1934), p. 56.

### III. DOCTRINE OF TÊ

It was doubtless with the object of facilitating study of the thick-set aphorisms in no clear order, which made up what came to be known as the *Tao Tê Ching*, that Chinese commentators applied themselves to cutting the refractory text into chapters and giving titles or explanatory headings to these. The latter device, if sometimes not too happily executed, was laudable enough; the merits of the former are attested by the fact that the mode of presentation in chapters has persisted to this day. In his brief account of the work as one composed by Lao Tan (Lao Tzū) on the eve of that worthy's departure "to the West", the historian Ssū-ma Ch'ien refers to an original division of its more than five thousand words: a twofold division which led to the "parts", whose keywords were *Tao* and *Tê* respectively, being called by editors (both ancient and modern) the *Book of Tao* and the *Book of Tê*.

While the first "part" deals fully with the meaning of *Tao*, one looks in vain through the so-called *Book of Tê* for anything approaching a definition of its subject, but from the hints and suggestions of what *Tê* does an inference can be drawn as to what *Tê* is—a function or faculty of *Tao* which is at once a "genius", a "magic" and a sort of providential "grace". Initially and fundamentally it is a "lord of life", a force of nature which, if unimpeded by man-made artificialities and checks, maintains intact for each animate being the primal freedom and freshness of its proper character. In another aspect it is a wonder-worker, an efficacy to be acquired by the man of *Tao* through nurturing his stock of *ch'i* or "vital energy"; a process which, if carried further by accumulating a reserve of

*ch'i*, enables him—as it enabled Mencius with his famous *hao jan chih ch'i*<sup>1</sup>—by a subtle wizardry to compass and command “all between heaven and earth” (the whole scheme of things). Again and lastly it is a test and standard, a guide to conduct of the most intimate kind; a holy spirit and comforter, as it were, perpetually available and never “letting down” its possessor. And so personal is all this, that the presence of *Tê* and its workings must be carefully concealed from the eyes of the world; to *Tê* (as to *Tao*) self-display is abhorrent, and it is up to the Taoist to keep his great gift “ensconced in the folds of his hair-cloth like a piece of fine jade”.

But the practitioner of *Tê*, whether prince or private individual, is automatically a transmitter of its mysterious power, and though he may manage successfully to mask the symptoms of *Tê* in his particular case, there can be no disguising its general effects, the marks of its impact on the community, the fruits of *Tê*. The so-called “three treasures”—the qualities of gentleness, frugality and not presuming to be foremost—might seem to be purely interior virtues of the sage; yet, caught and transformed by the “magic” of *Tê*, they assume a practical—a social-political—shape and become regulations for the conduct of the State. Hence the policies in government: first, of non-violence with special emphasis on the avoidance of aggressive war, and second, of a return (by ruthless pruning of cultural interests and the comforts of life) to the primitive ways of a golden age of pre-history. Hence also the policy, implicit in these two, of repressing any urge to “lord it” over other States. And lest it should be thought that such a régime, so negative in character and so uncouth, must fail to hold its own

<sup>1</sup> Literally, “flood-like breath”. “An overflowing moral energy, a kind of superlative personal morale”—E. R. Hughes and K. Hughes, *Religion in China* (1950), p. 37.

in a competitive world, the Taoist is reminded again and again that the apparent weakness of *Tao* is its strength—an invincible strength like that of water (the very embodiment of weakness) which meekly surrenders to the jutting rock, yet imperceptibly reduces it to powder and in the process bears it triumphantly away.

The injunction to "requite injury with *Tê*", which appears in the *Tao Tê Ching* and forms the subject of a question and answer in the Confucian *Analects*, is believed to have been a proverbial saying drawn from the common stock of such sayings available to Taoists and Confucians alike. On this supposition it is reasonable to interpret *Tê* in these contexts in its general sense,<sup>1</sup> and to render the proverb (as most scholars have done) by some such wording as "requite injury with kindness".<sup>2</sup> That this was the idea of the author of the *Tao Tê Ching* seems clear from a statement of his own about goodness: namely, that the sage "shows goodness to the good, and also to the bad, so that all may obtain goodness". The doctrine is not further developed in this work, nor, contrary to what might have been expected, does it figure at all in the copious treatises of *Chuang Tzŭ*. Where it emerges in the *Analects* it is in connection with an inquiry, addressed to Confucius by a person unnamed, as to what he thought of "requiting injury with kindness". It was a worthwhile question calling for a weighty answer, and it cannot be said that the premier sage of China failed to rise to the height of a great occasion in dealing with it as he did. The impression given

<sup>1</sup> As distinct from its specialized, technical Taoist sense.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Maclagan, exceptionally, preferred to read *Tê* in the Taoist context as "unmotivated indifference", and rejected the usual translation of the saying in favour of: "Be a Taoist even when injured." P. J. Maclagan, *Chinese Religious Ideas* (1926), p. 85.

by the *Analects* is that he regarded the saying as expressive of an idealism wholly unsuited to the troubled conditions of his time ; he was willing that kindness should be repaid with kindness (the effect of which, according to the *Book of Rites*, was to "stimulate the people" to be kind), but for injury, which in one shape or another was rampant always and everywhere, he held that the proper recompense was *justice* (that is, "straight dealing" or "what is correct").

An eminent sinologue, Dr. Herbert Giles, once wrote that Confucianism might "be said to contain all the great ethical truths to be found in the teachings of Christ".<sup>1</sup> To generalize quite so broadly as this would seem to be to over-simplify the case ; it should at any rate be noted, in any comparison of the ethics of Confucius and of Christ, that the former with his keen sense of "what worked" preferred to visit unsocial behaviour with a more realistic requital than mere "goodness".

<sup>1</sup> H. A. Giles, *Religions of Ancient China* (1905), p. 46.



#### IV. COUNTERPART OF TÊ IN THE CONFUCIAN "TEN WINGS"

IN a cosmological passage, which appears with rather startling suddenness between two dialogues in the twelfth discourse of *Chuang Tzŭ*, the *Tê* of *Tao* is presented in its metaphysical, as distinct from its moral, sense as the great determinant of "form" at the Start of Things. It was not enough that the world emerging from the mists of chaos should follow *Tao*, that is, that it should evolve spontaneously; it had within it the elements of a pattern, that of the prospective "heaven and earth", and it was vital to the development of this pattern that it should follow *Tê*. For *Tê* was that which gave each concrete thing its shape and special make-up; its "virtue", in the sense in which one speaks, for instance, of the virtue of a drug; its mode of being, that proper to it as a member of its class. If allowed free play—an important "if", which folk were apt to underrate—these gifts of *Tê* were ample to insure the orderly progression of "heaven and earth", the disciplined march of "the ten thousand creatures", all in their ranks and all in step with *Tao*.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of an individual "strong point" in things is illustrated in the ninth discourse of *Chuang Tzŭ* by examples taken from inanimate and animate Nature. Thus, the substance of clay is represented as having its own distinctive character, which

<sup>1</sup> A sharp distinction was drawn in Taoism between the order or pattern in Nature and its artificial counterpart in the institutions of men. While the former was lauded as the handiwork of *Tao*, the latter, which involved purpose and planning and amounted to a denial of *Tao*, was strongly condemned.

suffers impairment directly the potter brings his skill to bear on the plastic mass. In the same way, wood has its special character, which remains intact just so long as the material escapes the attentions of the carpenter and continues in the ideal state of the Unwrought Block. Again, in a striking passage, the point is made that there is a real nature of horses, which needs for its fulfilment absolute freedom and is lost when the animals are pressed into the service of man.<sup>1</sup> It behoved the governors of the world to take care, lest (like the potter, the carpenter and the horse-trainer) they so conducted themselves as to frustrate, when they ought to be fostering and furthering, the operations of Tê.

There are indications throughout *Chuang Tzŭ* of an eager interest on the part of its authors in the more spectacular of the outward showings of Tê: a sort of poetic excitement about the high spots or "wonders" of Nature, as modern popularizers of science are wont to call them. In particular, what intrigued these writers were the marks of Tê displayed to view by furred and feathered creatures of the wild: the singularities of physical form that constituted for each the cachet of its kind. Attention is drawn, for instance, to the blackness of the raven's wing and the whiteness of the swan's, to the beauty of skin of the tiger and leopard, to the length of leg of the crane and the squatness of the duck. As visible signs of the invisible Tê, these attributes had something sacrosanct about them; there must be no attempt to tamper with them in any way—to shorten the crane's legs or lengthen the duck's, a process which apart from its futility would cause suffering or worse. And what applied to the lower creatures was true also of the higher;

<sup>1</sup> A story is told in the *Lieh Tzŭ Book* of a Taoist judge of horses whose proficiency was such that he could choose a good horse by reference to its Tê, leaving questions of its colour and sex to settle themselves.

there must be no interference with the *T'ê* in man—with his soul or spirit which, according to *Chuang Tzû*, went out in all directions to nourish and transform and was the same in name as *Ti* (or God).

The idea of a vital force or principle, which fixes the pattern of existence for every individual thing, inanimate or animate, remained a speciality of Taoist thought until (perhaps about 250 B.C.) certain members of the Confucian school—anxious, it would seem, to provide a metaphysical basis for their moral code—set themselves to philosophize the ancient manual of Chinese augury, the *Book of Changes*. The result of these and subsequent labours—the Ten Wings—is strongly tinged with Taoism, but its general character—a reinterpretation of the auguristic text for the guidance of “the gentleman”—stamps it clearly as a product of the Confucian allegiance. The orthodox doctrines of the Four Books reappear in it, but are presented in a different form; in particular, *Tao*, which to Confucius and Mencius signified no more than a practical way of conduct, figures in the Ten Wings in an abstract sense, comparable to the metaphysical sense of *T'ê* in Taoism.

So close, indeed, were the minds of the unknown authors of the Wings to this sense of *T'ê*, that in the Great Appendix (the Fifth and Sixth Wings) where “heaven and earth” (the visible world) is credited with an inherent power—that of producing, of giving life—the term *T'ê* itself is used to designate this power. In other passages of the Great Appendix, where individual efficacies are ascribed to heaven, to earth, and also to man, the term used is *Tao* in the sense of “principle” or “law”; as actually defined in the text, this *Tao* is “what is beyond the material realm” (that of “implements” or finite things, as opposed to ideas). In the same way the basic portion of the *Changes*, extolled in the Great Appendix as a perfect

book, has its *Tao*, its principle or law, which is that of comprehensiveness; for to the Confucian amplifiers the apparatus of the book—the linear figures of the legendary Fu Hsi, and the enigmatic interpretations attributed to King Wên and the Duke of Chou<sup>1</sup>—appeared, when fully understood, to provide infallible moral guidance in all situations whatsoever. A noteworthy feature of the Great Appendix is the occurrence in it of multiple *Tao*: a threefold *Tao* of heaven, earth and man (referred to by Wilhelm as a "trinity of world principles"),<sup>2</sup> and a fourfold *Tao* of the ancient sages, covering the four chief outcomes—"judgments", "changes", "images" and "prognostications"—of their study of the linear figures (the divinatory diagrams).

It seems clear that the authors of the Great Appendix had in their minds, though perhaps vaguely, what is sometimes rather ponderously called (as by Wilhelm) the Principle of Individuation—the idea, namely, that in the phenomenal world each thing has its specific nature, and that this nature fixes a boundary which separates that thing from every other.<sup>3</sup> They made no attempt to develop this idea, which in Taoism was an all-important one; but in positing, for instance, a *Tao* of sun and moon and equating it with the quality of brightness, they came near to expressing what a Taoist would have termed the *Tê* (specific nature) of sun and moon. On the other hand, to identify the *Tao* of man—as the author of the *Shuo Kua* (the Eighth Wing) did—with the Confucian virtues *Jên* and *I* ("kindly sympathy" and "doing what is right"), was to court

<sup>1</sup> Father and son; the former a joint-founder, with King Wu, of the Chou dynasty (about 1100 B.C.).

<sup>2</sup> R. Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (English translation, 1951), Vol. I, p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 10.

opposition from the rival school, whose theory of virtue was that it should be natural, not acquired. More closely in line with Taoist thought was the author of the *Wên Yen* (the Seventh Wing), whose *Tao* of a wife and of one who serves is equated with the quality of receptiveness, of being "still"; yet the analogy with Taoism is not exact, inasmuch as this *Tao* was that of a class (of wives in general and of all who serve), whereas the *Tê* of Taoism was a property of individuals.

In their metaphysical character these *Tao* of a class are akin to the "universals" of Kung-sun Lung<sup>1</sup>—his *chih*, literally "fingers" or "pointers", which have been likened by Dr. Fung Yu-lan to Plato's "ideas".<sup>2</sup> But they have also—and this is the whole meaning of them—a moral character; as is very clearly shown in the *T'uan Chuan* (the First and Second Wings) where, in terms familiar to readers of the *Analects*, the *Tao* of the clan—the abstract principles of fatherhood, sonship and brotherly love—is presented as a practical rule of conduct for its members. What the *Tao* of the Ten Wings squarely point to, is a concept which took shape more than a thousand years later: the Neo-Confucian concept of *Li*, which was derived from these *Tao* and was, in fact, present in germinal form—as *Li*—in the Great Appendix and in the *Shuo Kua*. The nature of this concept has already been indicated in Note I.

A casual reference in the *Shuo Kua* to *Tao* and *Tê* in combination suggests that the author was, in this instance, viewing his subject through Taoist spectacles; that he was thinking of *Tao* as "The Way" in the sense of the nameless Great First Principle of Things, and of *Tê* as its "Power" in the special sense in which that term is used in the *Tao Tê Ching*.

<sup>1</sup> A prominent member of the Sophist school, who lived about 300 B.C.

<sup>2</sup> Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (1948), pp. 87 and 90.

## V. THE THEORY OF WU-WEI

THE principles of Taoism required that nothing, not even its body of doctrine, should be consciously planned ; as a result, the separate tenets are not to be found clear-cut in the literature of the school, but have to be disengaged from the argumentative and illustrative matter in which they are caught up. Three basic concepts—those of *Tao* the Absolute, the *Tao* of Evolutionary Process, and *Tê*—have already been noticed ; a fourth one, complementary to these, was *Wu-wei* or mystical inaction—the highest expression of the *Tao* of Conduct in the life of individual man, and the clue to sagely government of the world of men.

The highly concentrated advice to the Taoist to "Act inaction" (*Wei-wu-wei*) included a positive as well as a negative element ; he was to act and at the same time not to act, and if this looked absurd, he must understand that two very different kinds of action were referred to. The first of these was spontaneous action, of which Nature (that is, *Tao*) was the grand practitioner ; the second was action taken with design, premeditated and directed to chosen ends—that taken, for instance, by the Confucian school with a view to transforming "common men" into "gentlemen". The one kind, the action of Nature, was *real* action ; the other, however attractive it might seem, was a forcing of Nature and therefore unreal, and the student of *Tao* must learn to renounce it utterly.

To this spurious action the doctors of Taoism attributed everything that was refractory in the circumstances of their time : in particular the scramble for great possessions, as reflected in the flashy magnificence of the Court, the squalid

plight of the overtaxed masses, and the menace and misery of constantly recurring wars. These phenomena and others (such as the craze for moral culture, which if less reprehensible was equally un-Taoistic) were the sinister outcome of desires—not of natural desires, which could be satisfied without effort, but of inordinate cravings the appeasement of which involved, in addition to effort, competition and strife. Since the primitive days of the Nest-builders<sup>1</sup> man had furnished himself with the necessities of life and warded off danger, by instinct, like the “birds and beasts”; so long as he went thus far and no further, his simple régime of rural operations—his field-craft, his weaving, even his use of weapons—was natural action in accordance with *Tao* and therefore outside the scope of the prohibition in *Wu-wei*. It was when he exceeded his divine commission, elaborated his arts and multiplied his armaments, that the mischiefs of “science” (especially its powers of destruction) closed in upon him and caused his undoing; so, too, when he set up systems of law and reinforced them with punishments and rewards, the inevitable results were evasion, deceit, thieving, banditry, impoverishment and social unrest. The courses which normally he elected to follow were such as failed, either more or less, to satisfy the crucial test of naturalness; in their various ways they represented action—deliberate, contrived and therefore artificial—which the Taoist must avoid at all costs or forfeit his “precious jade”, the treasure of *Tao*.

Should he find himself getting caught up in such action, he must hasten to quell the unruly desires: to close the eyes to

<sup>1</sup> It was believed that in the dawn of civilization, before the introduction of house-building, men had made themselves dwellings for safety in the tops of trees. The tradition is mentioned in the *Chuang Tzŭ Book*; also in the *Lí Yün*, which forms part of the Confucian *Book of Rites* and is noteworthy for the evidences it contains of Taoist ideas.

the five colours and the ears to the five notes of music, to deny to the palate the five delectable tastes. These comely things, as creations of Nature, could not be otherwise than praiseworthy in themselves; but they were liable to be exploited, with damaging effects on the keenness and controllability of the senses, and if this should threaten, the one safe line for the Taoist was withdrawal from or indifference to them. What applied to the senses was true also of the mind, with its thirst for knowledge and for imparting knowledge, its urge to develop and extend human arts and skill; if proof were required of the dangers of knowledge, was it not provided by the "Hundred Schools", each shouting the others down in an effort to convince men that it alone was the possessor of Truth? *Wu-wei* (inaction) might be a term of mystery, but *Wu-yü* (desirelessness)—the stepping-stone to *Wu-wei*—was one that everybody could understand; there were no short cuts to *Wu-yü*, however, and it was only to be attained by a process of "daily diminishing and again diminishing" the recalcitrant desires. When this process was complete, the mind, no longer involved in the toils of positive action,<sup>1</sup> could give itself up to negative action, which was that of *Tao* and therefore true action: could be aimless and effortless yet all-efficient, like the stars in their courses or the four seasons, and by "doing nothing" in this sense be the master of everything.

<sup>1</sup> *Yu-wei*, the opposite of *Wu-wei*.



## VI. INVARIABLE WAY OF GOVERNMENT

As already mentioned, the leading principle of government on Taoist lines was *Wu-wei* (inaction), and writers of the school were emphatic in declaring that, if a "true man"—a practitioner of *Wu-wei*—were put in command of a State's affairs, all would be well with that State and it would be perfectly governed. The secret of this consummation lay partly in a compelling power inherent in *Wu-wei*, and partly in a sort of magical efficacy ascribed to the personal example of the Philosopher-King; good government was thus in theory automatic, when once the right individual had been chosen for its head. But certain (probably later) Taoists were conscious of a practical side to government and seemed to favour, if rather half-heartedly, a light form of public administration so ordered as to be not incompatible with *Wu-wei*.

A sidelight on this is provided, unexpectedly enough, by the Confucian *Analects*, where in one passage the semi-mythical Shun is lauded as an exponent of *Wu-wei*, and in another is stated to have managed well "all below heaven" with the assistance of five ministers. These five are clearly envisaged as officers charged with the day-to-day business of government, while the Emperor is one who reigns, but who does not rule; thus room was found in an ideal Confucian polity for both inaction and action, the former ("the waiting activity of the soul, the inactivity which is more real than any purposeful activity can be"<sup>1</sup>) connoting the method of divine sages, the latter the norm of conduct for ordinary men. Divine sages were, of course, a rarity, and the emphasis in Confucianism

<sup>1</sup> E. R. Hughes, *The Great Learning and the Mean-in-action* (1942), p. 175.

was all on action: did not the Master himself condemn the cult of inaction "in company with birds and beasts" by ordinary men as a travesty of the Way?

In Taoism inaction, though likewise extolled as the high technique of legendary sage-ancestors, was further presented (in sharp opposition to Confucianism) as the goal of humanity in the world of experience. But whereas the Confucians took pride in demonstrating the workability of their theory of action, the Taoists (apprehensive perhaps of seeming to indulge in conscious planning) were generally content, while stressing the principle of inaction, to let the practice take care of itself. A special interest attaches, therefore, to the thirteenth essay of the *Chuang Tzŭ Book*, where the author, a politically minded Taoist accepting (as the Confucians also did) the immemorial gradings of society, bases upon them a kind of working formula for government, which he calls "the invariable way".

The essence of his argument appears to be that as in Nature, apart from man, there are degrees of honour—the greater dignity, for instance, of the dome of "heaven" compared with the pavement of "earth"—so also, in the case of man, there are high positions and humbler ones, a class of rulers and a class of ruled, reflecting the natural division of a family into its head and its members. As to the functional difference between these classes, the ruled are those who constantly perform the inescapable taskwork of the world; who are active, not in the Confucian sense of operating a moralistic code, but in that of labouring to provide the necessities of simple living on Taoistic lines. The other class, the rulers, are those who control this activity, though lightly from afar, so lightly that the reins of government might be threads of gossamer in their hands; who are themselves inactive, inasmuch (to borrow the imagery of a later time) as they neither toil nor spin but "live

with *Tao*", like the lilies of the field. And the reason for the existence of the classes is that, if all men were inactive, the material needs of the Taoist community would not be met, and that, if all were active, there would be no room for a regnant Lord and Master of *Wu-wei*; it is only by the two modes in balance that perfect government is to be attained, and this—as the ancients discovered—is "the invariable way".

The author of this treatise, in thus creating for purposes of his argument an active class, seemed to Dr. Legge "by this distinction to give up the peculiarity of his system".<sup>1</sup> A contrary interpretation is, however, admissible. For if the task-work of the world, the toiling and spinning, was inescapable—and it was—the activity involved was no activity; it was "action as a last resort", which (as taught elsewhere in the *Chuang Tzŭ Book* and also in the *Tao Tê Ching*) was not only no lapse from *Wu-wei* but a sign of true power. Furthermore, the desire for food, clothing and shelter was a purely natural one, and the action taken to provide these things, if free from motives of gain and fame, was also natural and therefore in accordance with *Wu-wei*. On this basis the peculiarity of the system was far from given up.

Pursuing his theme of classes in the State, the essayist of "the invariable way" posits a third, intermediate class: that of ministers of State, executors of the great yet weightless decrees issued by the sovereign authority. These decrees, the highest expression of policy for the State as a whole, are the *essentials* of government; the detailed measures for carrying them out—the province of ministers—are the *non-essentials*, which are tabled under subject-headings in five main groups. In terms the headings are strongly reminiscent of ways of thought inimical to Taoism; thus the first and second—military measures and

<sup>1</sup> *The Texts of Taoism*, translated by J. Legge (1891), Part I, p. 144.

administration of rewards and punishments—have all the appearance of borrowings from a Legalist handbook. So also the remaining three—ritual and minor rules of law, musical appointments and mourning forms—suggest the conventional trappings of Confucian morality. But the essayist stresses that all these things are only “trivial elements” in the State, and by so doing dissociates himself from the rival schools; had his allegiance to the Taoist school been doubtful, those responsible for putting together the various parts of *Chuang Tzŭ* would hardly have included his work in their compilation. Yet, in arguing the case for his non-essentials on the basis that “the ancients” had them, he seems to strike a discordant note in Taoism; for the stock description of these folk, repeated at intervals in the Taoist classics, shows them as hostile to all governmental forms. One wonders why he did not rather take his stand on the law of naturalness and argue, like the unknown author of the famous final essay in *Chuang Tzŭ*, that the nature of man demanded music and mourning—and so on through the gamut of the non-essentials.

As Dr. Waley has remarked, “there was never a Taoist State as conceived by Chuang Tzŭ”.<sup>1</sup> Occasionally small, semi-private attempts at government by *Wu-wei* were made by individuals; in the third century A.D., for instance, a certain magistrate (brother of one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove) experimented successfully with it in his district. But in general the great idea remained unrealized; perhaps because, as originally conceived, it was too anarchic to be realizable and, in later forms such as “the invariable way”, not anarchic enough to command acceptance by the majority of believers in the Simplicity of Lao Tzŭ.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (1939), p. 248.  
“Chuang Tzŭ” means here the book rather than the man.

## VII. TAOISM AND THE SCHOOL OF LAW

It is one of the paradoxes of Chinese philosophy that the two schools of Taoism and Legalism (or rather two groups of thinkers, for in neither case was there actually a school) were arch-enemies in general policy and at the same time close, if unintentional, allies in particular fields of thought. The respective literatures, reflecting the paradox, contain what at first sight appear to be opposing elements; thus in the *Tao Tê Ching*, the Testament of Taoism, one finds in immediate juxtaposition both anti-Legalist and Legalist ideas, and in *Han Fei Tzû*, the chief work of Legalism, whole chapters devoted to "explanations" and "illustrations" of the *Tao Tê Ching*.<sup>1</sup> When examined, however, the apparent opposites resolve themselves into mutually consistent features of Taoism on the one hand and Legalism on the other.

It was strongly anti-Legalist, for instance, on the part of the author of the *Tao Tê Ching*, to declare that laws and regulations only encouraged banditry and theft, that prohibitions and restrictions impoverished the people, and that capital punishment was no deterrent from crime. All this was tantamount to a flat rejection of everything that Legalism stood for in "home" affairs—State control and the rule of law, law of the stiffest and sternest kind, backed by a hard-and-fast system of penalties and rewards. It was the same with his condemnation of war as an instrument for adjusting "foreign" (inter-State) affairs; a glance at the *Book of Lord Shang* is enough to show

<sup>1</sup> It is questionable whether these chapters were actually the work of Han Fei. The historian Ssü-ma Ch'ien, however, writing about 100 B.C., stated that Han Fei's doctrines were based upon Taoism.

how different, how very different, were the views of the first great Legalist on this topic. But when it came to saying that "people who knew too much were difficult to govern" and that "a ruler should make and keep his subjects knowledgeable", the Taoist author was voicing a sentiment common to his own school and Legalism—a deep dislike of moral-cultural knowledge of the type professed by the Confucian school. He was also at one with the Legalists in opposing the principle, held by the Confucians and the Mohists, that only persons of high moral worth (*hsien*) should be eligible for appointment to offices in the State. The Legalists and he were united, too, in their contempt for Confucian poring over books in search of antique doctrines of morality, and each group echoed the other in calling for the "banishment of learning" (in particular, learning of the three thousand odd rules of Confucian etiquette). And it was not only moral but every sort of cleverness that the two groups objected to; for instance, the hair-splitting logic of the Sophists, the "merchants of the market of fine words" of the *Tao Té Ching*.

The clue to the differences between the Taoists and the Legalists is to be found in their respective attitudes towards the many-faceted scheme of "heaven and earth", the universe or Nature. In each case a single aspect of the scheme was lauded and elaborated to the exclusion of the rest: in Taoism the spontaneity of Nature, in Legalism the fixity and permanence of Nature's law.<sup>1</sup> Theoretically there was nothing incompatible between the principles of spontaneity and law; were they not conjoined, in the most intimate way, in all the

<sup>1</sup> Not law in the sense of the natural sciences, but rather the order and pattern in Nature, which, according to *Kuan Tzū*, were clearly to be seen in the measured march of winter and summer, the constant properties of water and soil, and the regular life of animals and plants.

manifold phenomena of Nature—in the gathering of a cloud, the unfolding of a flower, which were artlessness itself and, at the same time, products of the inflexible mechanics of evolutionary change? But when in practice these principles came to be treated separately, so that their balance was upset, the result was extremism and a clash of ideals: the Taoists making a fetish of freedom, the Legalists one of rigidity, in human affairs.

While the rival schools, as already shown, saw eye to eye on a number of points, it must be borne in mind that the promptings behind their common views were far from coincident. Thus, knowledge (whether moral or cultural) and cleverness were denounced for different reasons: in Taoism because they conflicted with "simplicity", in Legalism because they diverted men's minds from the two great businesses of agriculture and war. So, too, the case against government by *hsien* was argued along divergent lines; the one side urging the substitution of exponents of natural virtue for *hsien*, the other the substitution of executants of law.<sup>1</sup> It was inconsistent of these schools, while damning the study of antiquity, to resort to it themselves; they did so, however, but with contrary intentions—the Taoists to prove that the Yellow Emperor, for instance, was a patron of Taoist ideas, the Legalists to establish an ancient origin for *Fa* (law).<sup>2</sup>

The last thing one would expect to find in a political system based on *Fa* (precisely codified statute law) is a recognition

<sup>1</sup> In this connection Han Fei pointed out that, human nature being what it was, there would seldom (if ever) be a sufficient number of *hsien* to go round. But *hsien* anyhow were unsatisfactory, because, according to Han Fei, they were liable to deceive their masters and to be deceived by the non-morally-worthy.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, in *Kuan Tzŭ* the early sage-kings are cited as exponents of government by methods of strict law.

of *Wu-wei*, or mystical inaction; for the whole point of such law was to promote, not *Wu-wei*, but its opposite, *Wei*, forced action, of the most intensive kind. Yet in the *Book of Lord Shang* the prince, the controller of this action, is vividly depicted as a practitioner of *Wu-wei*; as one who, leaning back on his couch and listening to the music of stringed and bamboo instruments, calmly looks on, while the State is well governed. At the same time it is clearly brought out that, in addition to enjoying affluence and ease, he is the wielder of an absolute, a quasi-magical power; the paramount law-giver, whose formulae or "fixed standards" have an unassailable validity, whatever the level of his personal intelligence may be. An efficient and smoothly running machine, which is what *Fa* is, needs only to be watched, not worked; hence Han Fei, following in the steps of Shang Yang, could justly refer to the lord of the Legalist State, who had promulgated his laws, as "a prince who does nothing". There is more than a surface resemblance here to the "sage" or ideal ruler of Taoism; the hard-headed realists of old China, like their Western counterparts in modern times, came near to mysticism in much of their thought, and in equating kingship with government by *Wu-wei* aligned themselves directly with the Taoists, and also (incongruously enough) with those of the Confucian school, including its Master, who were prone to extol the "ancients" for their exercise of *Wu-wei*.<sup>1</sup>

A chapter (the fifty-fifth) of *Kuan Tzŭ*, which recently appeared in a new translation by the late Professor G. Haloun of Cambridge,<sup>2</sup> illustrates the wedding of Taoism and Legalism in this, the oldest of the scriptures of the School of Law. Thus,

<sup>1</sup> As in the *Book of Changes* (Great Appendix), where the author says: "The Yellow Emperor, Yao and Shun [simply] let their robes hang down, and the world was in order."

<sup>2</sup> *Asia Major*, New Series, Vol. II, Part I (April, 1951), pp. 85-120.



as part of the general apparatus of advice to a ruler or prospective ruler, injunctions to govern by *Wu-wei* are coupled with typically Legalist reminders concerning, for instance, "adjustment of the name to the reality" (making the title and the function of offices correspond).

## VIII. THE AXIS OF TAO

IN a passage now recognized as a late addition to the text of the Confucian *Doctrine of the Mean*, the author, a witness (it would seem) of the short-lived triumph of Legalism under the First Emperor,<sup>1</sup> comments pointedly on the régime in the following terms :

To no one but the Son of Heaven [the Emperor] does it belong to determine the rules of *Li* [ritual], the standards of weight and measurement, and the forms of the ideographs [written characters]. To-day, all over the Empire, cart-wheels are the same distance apart, books are written in the same characters, and the regulations for conduct are the same.

There is nothing in the context of the passage to suggest disapproval of these outcomes of Legalist "unity" ; on the contrary, the author appears to accept them, provided (a typically Confucian proviso) that the Emperor is a possessor of moral personality (*Tê*). No Confucian, indeed, could fail to be impressed by such large-scale social tidyings-up ; Confucianism was all for good order in a State, and the great "First Unifier" had contributed notably to this end. By his time the Legalist conception of unity had lost the metaphysical sense attached to it, for instance, in parts of *Kuan Tzŭ* ; it had hardened into a political doctrine which, if not uninteresting from the Confucian point of view, had no affinity with Taoist philosophic thought.

<sup>1</sup> Shih Huang Ti (died 210 B.C.), conqueror of all China. In the account of his labours by Ssŭ-ma Ch'ien specific mention is made of reforms affecting weights and measures, cart-axes and the ideographs.

An external uniformity imposed by the State—the Legalistic “order” described in *Kuan Tzŭ* as the highest good—was, in fact, the antithesis of unity as the Taoists understood it. To them the highest, the only, good was the transcendent unity of *Tao* (Nature), the far-flung unity of “the ten thousand things”, which it was for man to realize, not corporately as “the State”, but individually and interiorly in the profundities of his being. In the opening chapter of the *Tao Tê Ching*, as previously noted,<sup>1</sup> this unity is defined: as an Absolute Sameness behind the multitudinous apparent differences of the phenomenal world. In the second chapter examples of these differences are given in the shape of contrasting attributes, and the point is made that every attribute, being conditioned by its opposite, is relative and therefore unreal. Thus the quality of beauty, according to this doctrine, is not to be regarded as absolute, for to say that a thing is beautiful simply means that it is less unlovely than something else which is taken as a standard of ugliness. Conversely, the idea of ugliness, which is caught up with that of beauty, has a relative significance only and no real value; and the same is true of virtue (and vice), of difficulty (and ease), of length (and shortness)—in fact, of every quality that can be thought of. It was incumbent on the Taoist, as best he might, to extricate his mind from this web of relativity and in the freedom of the Absolute to “forget the Many in the One”.

The interdependence of everything in Nature, and the folly of supposing that “private” opinions (held from one viewpoint only) can ever be conclusive, are leading themes in the *Chuang Tzŭ Book*, where they are expounded with vigour and skill and a wealth of illustration. The first of the essays is crowded with examples of “relativeness” of one sort or

<sup>1</sup> See Note I (2).

another ; in particular, much play is made with the skyward soarings of a giant bird, which although apparently a free agent, had to wait upon the wind.<sup>1</sup> The lesser creatures—the cicada and the wren—are types of those in blinkers, as it were, whose vision is restricted to their special sphere ; another in this class—the little quail—even dares to describe its puny flying efforts among the bushes as “the perfection of flight”. A further case of such “small knowledge” is that of the mushroom of a morning’s duration ; unconscious of existences other than its own, this tiny, short-lived plant knows nothing of the mighty growth of immemorial trees, nothing of the longevity of P’êng Tsu (the Chinese Methuselah). So in human society there is the “little man”, capable no doubt of managing effectively an office, a district or even a State, but ignorant (like the quail) of the potentialities of the wider world beyond his horizon. The correlative (and corrective) of “small knowledge”—the “great knowledge” which enables its possessor to “chariot on the normality of heaven and earth, drive as a team the six elements in their phases, and thus go ranging through infinity-eternity”—is the subject of detailed exposition in the second essay.

In an eloquent passage introduced by the statement that “great knowledge is all-inclusive”, the author of this second essay deplors the bustling activity of the masses of men, the battle of wits and words that daily engrosses them. Hesitations, doubts, reservations, fears—of such is the pitiful substance of their lives, and why ? Because they prefer the Many (the man-made distinctions between things) to the One (the *Tao*).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> So also the philosopher Lieh Tzū, whose *T’ê* was such that he could ride on the wind, still had to depend on “something” (that is, the wind).

<sup>2</sup> This preference was a matter of pride to the Confucians, in whose *Classic of Changes* (Third and Fourth Wings) is the dictum : “The gentleman makes distinctions between things.”

The worst offenders in this respect are the "clever" people who have judgments to deliver: Confucians and Mohists, for instance, each claiming a monopoly of truth about right and wrong, and the school of Sophists lording it with their points of logic. What these know-alls fail to see is that they only muddle the ideas of right and wrong; that a state of affairs in which one school's theory of good is another's theory of bad, gets mankind nowhere and makes nonsense of right and wrong. As against all such, the Taoist sage detaches himself from "this" and "that" and looks at all antinomies "in the light of Heaven"; ensconced in *Tao*, he takes no part in rivalries of schools and groups, although (such is the catholicity of "great knowledge") he studies them with interest.

In a striking image, which is characteristic of the writer in *Chuang Tzŭ* at his best, the world of thought is figured forth in terms that suggest a revolving sphere, the poles of each of the countless diameters of which represent the "this" and "that" of the antinomies. The axis of the sphere, aloof and still in the midst of constant movement and change, stands for the unity in plurality, which is *Tao*—for "the central peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation", which is the comfort of the Taoist.

## IX. TECHNIQUE OF TRANCE

AMONG the numerous anecdotes about persons, with which the argument of the *Chuang Tzŭ* and *Lieh Tzŭ Books* is enlightened and enlivened, there are not a few that exhibit individual Taoists in states of mental abstraction ranging from a light detachment to complete amnesia. The *Tao Tê Ching*, which is devoid of anecdote, contains only vague and veiled allusions to such states.

As instances of the milder types of abstraction, the *Chuang Tzŭ Book* (in passages which to a large extent are paralleled in *Lieh Tzŭ*) presents some half-dozen cases of craftsmen noted for exceptional dexterity in their respective crafts. The first of these cases, a famous one, is that of the master-cook of King Hui of Wei. Familiar by long habit with each bone and sinew of the carcass to be cut up, he could arrest his sight and other senses and wield the well-tried carving-knife with his mind; his method being to work *along* and not *against* the various parts, thus "following nature", that is, applying the law of *Tao*, the clue to every craft. The experiences of others—the boatman, the swimmer, the bowman, the wheelwright, the tax-gatherer, the smith—are drawn on to illustrate further and bring home this point. Much play is made with advanced age in descriptions of these masters of expert tasks; it was only by intensive practice and concentration that they acquired their skill, and years, perhaps a lifetime, were involved in this. For theirs was a special kind of skill, a fine art rather than a craft: the subtle art of matching the "essence" of the mind to that of the medium in which it had to work. It was not a thing that could be learnt up (as, for instance, a science could be)

by fact-finding and instruction in facts ; it had to grow spontaneously, like a flower, in a mind divested—however long the process of divestment might take—of hampering preoccupations with the world of sense.<sup>1</sup>

In one of these stories a worker in wood, whose genius had fashioned a stand for bells, explains how he disciplined his mind for this particular task ; how, during a period of seven days, he discarded first all thoughts of reward, then all hopes of praise and fears of blame, and finally all awareness of his bodily self. Such methodical shedding of the veils of consciousness, with a view to liberating the spirit within, is a feature of other narratives in these books not necessarily connected with the pursuit of art. A much-quoted passage in *Chuang Tzŭ* not only defines but gives a name to modes of abstraction of this sort ; in form a series of brief exchanges between Confucius and his disciple, Yen Hui, this passage is a good example of the tactic—a common one in *Chuang Tzŭ*—of representing Confucian worthies as willing converts to Taoist ideas. In contrast to the genuine Yen Hui of the *Analects*, praised by Confucius for his ability to “steep himself in *Jên* for three months on end”, this apocryphal Yen Hui is portrayed as one who, having “forgotten” *Jên* and *I* (the two chief Confucian virtues) and ritual and music (concomitants of those virtues), attains the state of “sitting and forgetting”, that is, the state of the vacant mind, of *Tso-wang*.<sup>2</sup> The technique of *Tso-wang*, des-

<sup>1</sup> The favourable treatment of handicrafts in these stories fits ill with the doctrine, so forcefully expounded in other passages of *Chuang Tzŭ*, that any working up of a raw material is damaging to its “virtue” or proper character. The inconsistency is doubtless attributable to different authors in *Chuang Tzŭ* expressing themselves (Taoistically) from different points of view.

<sup>2</sup> According to Maspero, the expression *Tso-wang* was not invented by the Taoist mystics, but was borrowed by them from the professors

cribed by Yen Hui, is a fourfold procedure of which these are the steps: letting the limbs and frame go slack, closing the avenues of sense-perception, shaking off material forms and dismissing knowledge (of the "acquired", the Confucian, kind). Having cleared his mind in this way, the exercitant is "one with the Great Pervader of Everything"; with the inward eye of ecstatic vision he sees face to face the Absolute *Tao*, which the ordinary Taoist, not so initiated, can only see (if at all) through a glass, darkly. In spite of its obvious falsification of the personality of a great Confucian, this episode is important as pointing to the existence, in the Taoism of the time of *Chuang Tzŭ*, of a definite régime of trance-induction comparable to Hindu *Yoga* and Buddhist *Dhyāna*.

In conventional language so often repeated that it tends to assume the appearance of a formula, the mind of the adept in the condition of *Tso-wang* is stated to have been like cold ashes and his body like the dry wood of a withered tree. He was commonly found, on emerging from trance, to have a doctrinal message to deliver or the experience of a spiritual wandering (*Yu*) to relate; thus, Nan-kuo Tzŭ Ch'í "came to" with a parable for his pupil on the Music of Nature, and Lao Tan (Lao Tzŭ) with a personal account, addressed to Confucius, of a voyage to the World's Beginning. In some cases graduation in the art of *Tso-wang* was a long-drawn-out affair; the mysterious Lieh Tzŭ, for instance, took nine years under close tuition to reach the stage of "drifting like a leaf, not knowing whether he was riding on the wind or the wind on him". Of the same order, if not actually the same, as *Tso-wang* was the process called "fasting of the mind"—a process alleged in *Chuang Tzŭ* to have been studied by Yen Hui (in addition to of witchcraft. H. Maspero, *Le Taoïsme, Mélanges Posthumes*, Vol. II (1950), p. 142.



*Tso-wang*), and in *Lieh Tzŭ* to have been tried by the legendary Yellow Emperor. In this, too, the object was to forget, to forget everything : to forget even (which Yen Hui apparently could not do <sup>1</sup>) the fact that everything had been forgotten.

As a physical aid to *Tso-wang* and its variants some Taoists practised controlled breathing, supplemented, as time went on, by a species of gymnastic arts, or rather antics, similar to Hindu *Hatha-yoga*. A brief allusion in the *Tao Tê Ching* to soft breathing ("like a little child's"), and another in *Chuang Tzŭ* to deep breathing ("from the heels"), suggest that there were different methods of operating this control ; details of these are lacking, however, nor is it always clear whether the end in view was mental cultivation or the promotion of longevity. As to additional exercises, there is mention in *Chuang Tzŭ*, and in the later work *Huai-nan Tzŭ*, of mimickings of the postures and movements of animals and birds : the pawings of the bear, the flappings of the duck, the ape's dance, the owl's fixed stare and the tiger's crouch. These performances, as a discipline of longevity, are condemned in *Chuang Tzŭ* ; indeed, from the standpoint of the higher Taoism, they merited condemnation whatever their purpose, for it was absurd, while repudiating externals, to exploit them in this way. Even breath-control could be overdone, according to *Chuang Tzŭ* ; but the breath was "the life" and, if properly managed, was a suitable instrument for helping men to "sit and forget".

<sup>1</sup> For comments on this falling short of Yen Hui, in works of the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., see Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (1948), pp. 218-19.

## X. THE TAOIST NO GENTLEMAN

It was common ground between Confucians and Taoists that, while all men were born to be virtuous, not all could be sages ; but if sagehood was the privilege and prerogative of a few—the elect “ teachers of a hundred generations ”—this did not mean that the many were debarred from reaching heights of virtue matched to their capacities. There were, indeed, more particularly in Confucianism, degrees of virtue even among sages ; thus Mencius in his moral hierarchy posited two grades—the “ spirit-like ” (*Shén*), the saint beyond man’s power of comprehension, and the “ holy ” (*Shéng*), the great wielder of a transforming influence. So also, in the later phase of Taoism represented by the final essay of *Chuang Tzǔ*, one finds a scale of values for sages arranged in descending order from the “ heavenly ” (*T’ien-jén*). In both traditions these paragons were defined in vague and sometimes (as, for instance, in the *Doctrine of the Mean*) extravagant words ; but to the candidate for sagehood this vagueness did not matter, because sagely knowledge was intuitive and transcended definitions. When it came to laying down standards of virtue for everyday life in society, more precision was needed ; and the follower of Confucius who aspired to be a “ gentleman ”, and his counterpart in Taoism, the potential “ true man ”, were left in no doubt by their masters as to what these terms meant.

It must be borne in mind, in any comparison of these ideal figures of the rival schools, that as time went on their original outlines tended to become blurred under the impact of advancing thought. Thus the image of “ the gentleman ” presented by the *Analects* is seen on examination to be a composite one :

based mainly on sayings of Confucius and his disciples, in which morals were emphasized rather than "form", and partly on scholar-ritualist interpolations, in which the emphasis was reversed. There is some confusion of the image, too, due to the use of the term *Chün-tzū* (gentleman) with various shades of meaning; for it appears not only in its specialized Confucian sense of "a man of virtue and education", but sometimes as the equivalent of "philosopher", and occasionally in its pre-Confucian sense of "aristocrat" (literally, "son of a feudal lord"). Nevertheless the type of character that emerges is a definite and recognizable one—a character rooted in *Jên* (kindly sympathy) and manifesting, in every detail of its owner's bearing and behaviour, the fine flowers of that most gracious quality. A lover of learning, an adept in ritual and music, and a master of "the middle course", the *Chün-tzū*—trained for tasks of government—is at the same time a man of action, a militant *Shih* or "knight" of the Confucian Way.

In certain passages of the *Analects* (other than those suspected to be intrusions from Taoism<sup>1</sup>) the moral attributes of "the gentleman" are defined in phrases which, though genuinely Confucian, look not unlike descriptions of the Taoist "true man". Thus the gentleman is stated, in utterances ascribed to Confucius himself, to be "calm and serene"; to be "slow of speech"; to be "free from grief and fear"; to be one who "never contends". But when the inner meanings of these phrases are examined, they are seen to have little connection with Taoist ideas. There are kinds and degrees of "calmness and serenity"; and the peace of the Confucians—a high satisfaction, the reward of a virtuous and well-ordered life—was far removed from the mystical-magical impassivity,

<sup>1</sup> In particular, passages dealing with recluses; for details see *Confucius the Man and the Myth*, by H. G. Creel (1951), pp. 67, 213 and 315.

the stillness or quiet, of the Taoists. So also Confucian "slowness of speech"—a greater readiness with deeds than with words—contrasted sharply with Taoist reticence, which was based on an objection in principle to words as such.<sup>1</sup> Again, on the subject of "grief and fear", there was a wide divergence between the respective views: Confucius holding (or seeming to hold) that these feelings were superfluous if the conscience was clear, while the Taoists, especially Chuang Tzū, advocated a suppression of all the emotions as a step towards emptying the mind for the occupancy of *Tao*. And "never contending" in the Confucian sense, that is, not striving (except in sport) to get the better of other people, was very different from Taoist pacifism, which meant a "water-like" yielding to everyone and everything.

On one point however—the unwillingness of the world to accept the doctrines offered to it—the two schools found themselves in unqualified agreement; and in each case the sentiment was expressed (by Yen Hui the favourite disciple of Confucius, according to Ssū-ma Ch'ien's account, and by the author of the *Tao Té Ching* in his seventieth chapter) that upon the fact that he was not understood depended the value of the school's "exemplary man". But a Taoist might with some justification have wondered whether the Confucians were wholly sincere in this; for, while their Master (as recorded in the *Analects*) stressed that a gentleman should not be disturbed at the failure of others to recognize his merits, he also said that it was distasteful to a gentleman to die without having made

<sup>1</sup> See Note XII. The linking of deeds with words was typically Confucian. Thus, in the Great Appendix to the *Book of Changes*, Confucius is represented as saying: "Words and deeds are the hinge and spring of the gentleman . . . Through words and deeds he moves heaven and earth."

a reputation for himself. From the standpoint of Taoism the latter statement was a highly provocative and challenging one ; for did not the Taoist doctors teach that love of fame was the vanity of vanities, and that "lying hidden"—its opposite—was the perfection of the Way?

Like the *Chün-tzū* of the Confucians, the Taoist "true man" was exhibited in the main as a model for the prospective administrator ; and in the *Tao Tê Ching* (the fifteenth chapter) a description is given of rulers or officers, who "in ancient times" (the mythical Golden Age of pre-history) displayed the requisite qualities. Two aspects of the nature of these personages are distinguished, an inner and an outer ; but of the inner nature nothing definite could be predicated, for in its subtlety and abstruseness it was "too profound to be understood". The outer nature—the appearance or "attitude" presented to the world of men—was easier to delineate ; and its principal marks, each with an appropriate metaphor, are listed in a sevenfold enumeration. The first of these was a hesitancy or shrinking, like that of one about to ford a stream in winter ; the second was caution, of the kind engendered by an awareness of ever-present danger ; the third was deference, as of a guest towards his host. The fourth and fifth were yieldingness and simplicity, the properties respectively of melting ice and of virgin timber (that is, the Unwrought Block) ; the sixth was vacancy, the "spirit of the valley" ; and the seventh, opacity, like the murkiness of troubled water. This recital, although related in terms to the special case of the ruler or officer, could be treated as applying to the private individual as well ; it was, in fact, but a development in detail of the same author's "three treasures", which were offered without limitation to the community at large.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Note III.

A comparable description in the *Chuang Tzŭ Book* of the ancient Taoist adept (*Chên-jên*) is fraught with symptoms of beliefs and practices characteristic of Taoism in its declining stages. The statement that this "true man" was immune from the harmful effects of fire and water, and from the haunting terrors of high and perilous places, suggests strongly that a magical element was already penetrating what had once been a pure philosophy; and the further statement that he "breathed from his heels" is clearly an adumbration of, if not a direct allusion to, techniques for inducing trance through breath-control.<sup>1</sup> It is a sign of lateness, too, that four things by which the Confucians set great store—social order, ritual or good form, knowledge (of the moral sort) and virtue—figure in the description without being condemned outright; the "worthy of old" could not indeed accept these things as ends in themselves, but he could and did, according to *Chuang Tzŭ*, interpret and make them his own in a Taoistic way. For the rest, he was—in the words of Dr. Legge—a being "free from all exercise of thought and purpose, entirely passive in the hands of the *Tao*".<sup>2</sup> How different from the Confucian idea of the *Chün-tzŭ*, this paradox of the Man of Gentleness who was also No Gentleman!

<sup>1</sup> See Note IX.

<sup>2</sup> *The Texts of Taoism*, translated by J. Legge (1891), Part I, p. 135.

## XI. PROPHETS WITHOUT HONOUR

If anyone interested in ancient schools of thought and with a taste for character-study should feel disposed to try his hand at a treatise on Confucius as a personality, he would find a mass of material to draw upon, varying indeed in date and authenticity yet not inadequate, when duly appraised, for his purpose. On the factual side he would have the advantage of the slender but well-packed biography of Ssü-ma Ch'ien; and even if no other source were available, the "sayings" of the *Analects* would allow him to construct at least a portrait in outline of Confucius the man. If instead he should turn his attention to Mencius, he would get little help from Ssü-ma Ch'ien, whose account of the "Second Sage" is surprisingly jejune; this deficiency, however, is largely made up by the *Book of Mencius*, which in a setting of incident presents its subject as a great "scholar-gentleman", moving impressively from State to State and gracing the arena of politics with his noble philosophy.

In contrast to these Confucian notabilities, the "worthies" of Taoism—the reputed authors of its three major classical books—give almost no scope at all for biographical analysis. It was not that the Taoists objected in principle to the use of intellectual or literary abilities; these were gifts of Nature (that is, of *Tao*) and it was permissible for the recipient to enjoy and exploit them, provided that he did so in a strictly natural way. Nor was it that the authors of the classics could be shown to have contravened this important proviso: would anyone dare, for instance, to ascribe to conscious cleverness rather than to Nature the depth and vigour, the subtlety and charm, the *relish*

of the wisdom and wit of Chuang Tzū? The real clue to the elusiveness in a biographical sense of this trio of personages—Lao Tzū, Chuang Tzū and Lieh Tzū—is the fact that in Taoism the philosophy was everything and the philosopher nothing; if there were a message to be delivered, a book to be written, it was incumbent on the announcer or author to express himself with a minimum of fuss, and then, having offered his work to the world, to retire from it nameless and fameless and “leaving no trace”.<sup>1</sup>

It may seem curious to find the Taoists parading in the titles of their books the names of “worthies” who, according to the teaching of those books, should have been left unhonoured and innominate. But in this they were only following convention—the practice, common in philosophic schools, of naming a “scripture” (or group of writings, possibly the work of several hands) after the “sage” (or thinker) responsible for furnishing its principal ideas. In one such case, that of “Lieh Tzū”, the identity of the so-called sage is as vague as his alleged connection with the scripture; indeed, it has been suggested that “Lieh Tzū” was not a personal name at all, but a collective term denoting a “body of philosophers” holding Taoist views.<sup>2</sup> It is true that in the *Book of Lieh Tzū* events in the life of “the Master” are recorded, which point to the existence of a real person—his refusal (to the annoyance of his wife) of a gift of grain from the ruler of Chêng, his submission to a nine years’ discipline of the mind, his emergence at a time of famine from his shelter in Chêng. There are allusions, too, to

<sup>1</sup> Compare the “person with the character of a dragon, who yet remains hidden”, described—allegedly by Confucius—in the *Book of Changes* (Seventh Wing). Like much else in the Ten Wings, this description is markedly Taoist both in letter and spirit.

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Parker, *Studies in Chinese Religion* (1910), p. 165.



his having lived in poverty, to his skill as an archer, to the multitude of his adherents; but when all this information is put together, and allowance is made for some of it being parable, the figure that takes shape is so insubstantial that the references in *Lieh Tzū* (re-echoed in *Chuang Tzū*) to the Master "riding on the wind" seem aptly to describe him. He is the subject of half a dozen episodes in *Chuang Tzū*, but these are only duplicates or variants of passages to be found in *Lieh Tzū*, and even the essay in the former book which carries the heading "Lieh Yü-k'ou" has nothing more than its opening paragraph (and that a duplicate episode) to offer about him. Ssü-ma Ch'ien, for some reason, does not mention Lieh or throw any light on the difficult question of fixing the date of the Lieh Scripture—a problem which is still unsolved to-day, European opinion tending to assign the work to the third century B.C., while Chinese scholars prefer to regard it as a forgery of the third or fourth century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

A comparable obscurity, so far as factual details are concerned, surrounds Chuang Chou, the presiding genius of the company of writers (for it is fairly clear that there was more than one) responsible for the text of the longest of the classics of Taoism. Ssü-ma Ch'ien, though credited (like his father Ssü-ma T'an) with a predilection for Taoist ideas, contributes only the briefest of memoirs, which is not so much biographical as critical; it represents Chuang as a prince of philosophers, unmatched in dialectic and a master of prose, but, owing doubtless to a paucity of material connected with the doctrine of "leaving no trace", it hardly reveals him at all as a man amongst men. At intervals throughout the thirty-three essays which make up the

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (1934), p. 136, and Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (1948), p. 232.

extant *Chuang Tzŭ Book*,<sup>1</sup> he comes on the stage either in soliloquy or in argumentative contact with others—with disciples even more shadowy than himself, with Hui Tzŭ the logician, with ambassadors and kings. But the introduction of a personal feature (for instance, his dressing in rags and begging for rice) is always merely the occasion or pretext for an exposition of Taoist beliefs; and so slight and scattered are these items, and so difficult is it to determine which are imaginary and which real, that any hope of extracting from them a valid basis for a Life of Chuang must be abandoned. Yet one has the feeling after reading the essays of having encountered, if not the person, at least the presence of a truly remarkable man—an original thinker, a metaphysician, a poet and mystic, a “*Tao-saturated man*”.<sup>2</sup> It is not to be supposed that the work under his name is all on the same high level of quality; on the contrary, some of it, probably by lesser and possibly by later hands, is commonplace and dull. But other parts are incomparably fine, and it is tantalizing to know so little about the man who wrote them; it must be borne in mind, however, that in Taoism self-effacement was the order of the day and prophesying without honour a divine imperative.

“When your work is done and there is a prospect of fame, withdraw yourself, for such is the Way of Heaven.” The unknown author of the *Tao Tê Ching* (for modern scholarship seems finally to have disposed of the traditional ascription of the book to “Lao Tzŭ”) was insistent on this principle and practised it rigidly himself. Apart from occasional references

<sup>1</sup> At one time the book was considerably longer. The catalogue of the Imperial Library of Han, compiled towards the beginning of the Christian era, gives fifty-two as the number of essays. Fragments of the lost ones are traceable in early commentaries.

<sup>2</sup> L. Giles, *Musings of a Chinese Mystic* (1906), p. 12.

to "a sage" or "the sage" having said this or that, there is nothing in the text to connect it with a specific person ; even the theory of a so-called autobiographical chapter (the twentieth) has now been discredited. In the *Tao Tê Ching*—as always in Taoism—it was the message that was the urgent, the important thing ; as regards the messenger, it was open to posterity (if it chose) to explore the problem of the individual and the name.

## XII. WISDOM OF NO WORDS

THE Confucian *Analects* end abruptly, and the final sentence—a dictum of the Master that “without knowing words one cannot know men”<sup>1</sup>—rings sharply out like a valedictory note of warning to followers of the Confucian “Way”. By “knowing words” was meant understanding (that is, appraising and interpreting) the utterances of men; the art, a difficult one, of sizing up from the terms and tones of speech the actual traits and trends of the speaker’s mind.<sup>2</sup> In the same sense Mencius, the “psychologist” and sage, is recorded to have said to a disciple “I know words”; his special object of study in this field having been, as he explained to the disciple, “one-sided, extravagant, evil and evasive words”. Such words, he argued, were mischievous in government and tended to undermine the conduct of affairs; in common with all other words, however, they had their value as indices of character, that vital element in the make-up of the moral State. Good words, of course, were the graceful accomplishment of a “gentleman”, the fine florescence of the moral mind; it was quite unthinkable that a Confucian should disparage those indispensable appurtenances of culture, the shining instruments of education, the ambassadors of the School.

Contemporaneously with the expression of these views, representing a century and more of Confucian thought, the voice of Taoism was raised to confute—if not so loudly, yet with

<sup>1</sup> The paragraph containing this sentence in the version of the *Analects* used to-day is missing in the ancient and basic Lu version.

<sup>2</sup> It appears from another saying in the *Analects* that Confucius thought it necessary to study the expression of men’s faces as well as their words.

no less force—the popular acceptance of words and their worth. The essence of Taoist ideas on this subject was that all a man needed to know was *Tao*; that knowledge of *Tao* was only to be had intuitively, that is, by direct apprehension; and that words with their finite connotations, however appropriate for other purposes, were for this transcendent purpose irrelevant and superfluous. "Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know"—in this forthright sentence, a model of compression, the Fathers of Taoism laid down their Doctrine of No Words. But they realized that words were not wholly to be dispensed with; it was obvious (to quote Mr. Aldous Huxley<sup>1</sup>) that "if the Enlightened did not preach, mankind would still be unaware that there was a way to lose or a goal to be reached, and there would be no deliverance for anyone"; and this was the answer to those critics who—like Po Chü-i, the great T'ang poet<sup>2</sup>—were inclined to poke fun at Lao Tzū, the reputed author of the *Tao Tê Ching*, for advocating the eschewal of words and at the same time putting five thousand of them into that book of his. And what applied to words was true also of books, concerning which the author of the thirteenth essay in the *Chuang Tzū Book* (a book indeed!) had a telling comment to make. Books, he said, were really no more than words, and words no more than symbols of ideas; ideas were the shapings of something other, which could not be communicated in words; hence the valuable thing in books was not that they stood for *Tao* (as the world supposed) but that as carriers of words they pointed the way to what was beyond both books and words.

It would be wrong to credit the Taoists with definite plans

<sup>1</sup> A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (1946), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> For Po Chü-i's gibe at Lao Tzū, see Arthur Waley, *Chinese Poems* (1946), p. 190.

for spreading the truth of *Tao*, but it is clear that, while they were forced to employ both preaching and scripture as starting methods, they preferred, once the truth had been launched, to rely on the recondite method of "wordless teaching". The all-important, the only lesson to be taught was that of following Nature (the principle of spontaneity in the universe, which was *Tao*); and Nature's way was essentially "wordless" as shown, for instance, in the work of the seasons, which expressed and perfected themselves without speech or argument. But Nature, though wordless, was emphatically a teacher in the sense of one who taught passively by the power of example—that subtle power which (as in Confucianism) was held to be capable by a sort of bewitchment of causing an entire community to bend to its sway. In the *Tao Tê Ching* this doctrine of wordless teaching is linked with another, that of "actionless action"<sup>1</sup>; the two together constituting, as it were, the stock-in-trade of the instructor in Taoism, though a warning is given that few can attain to these arts. Examples of the former in actual operation are to be found in the curious hagiography of the *Chuang Tzû Book*—in the story of the saint-like cripple of Lu (whose disciples were "as numerous as those of Confucius", and the effect of whose wordless teaching was such that "people went to him empty and came away full"), and in that of the ugly mystic of Wei (who "spoke not at all, yet was believed by men").

By an odd coincidence the closing sentences of the *Tao Tê Ching*, like those of the *Analects*, include a challenging assertion on the subject of words. "The good do not argue; those who argue are not good."<sup>2</sup> This judgment, like that of the

<sup>1</sup> See Note V.

<sup>2</sup> Compare *Chuang Tzû's* phrase: "The Great Argument does not need words"; and *Lieh Tzû's* reference (which is echoed in *Chuang Tzû*) to the real speaker—the sage—being one who says nothing.

Confucians, had a ring of finality ; and, so far as the truth about words was concerned, the rival schools—each sure that it was right—could do no otherwise than register an agreement to differ.

### XIII. HUMAN NATURE: GOOD OR BAD?

THE Taoists objected to argument, in the sense of discussion of a philosophic problem, on two grounds: first, because differences of opinion (like all other differences) clashed with the oneness of *Tao*, and second, because argument never settled anything, as was proved by the existence of the "Hundred Schools", whose only achievement was to complicate and confound the *Tao* (the truth of things) instead of clarifying it. Chuang Chou, in particular, felt strongly on the topic and pressed these objections with energy and zest<sup>1</sup>; he was satisfied, however, to illustrate his theme by reference to general arguments between groups (Confucians, Mohists, followers of Yang Chu and Sophists). If he had chosen to cite specific cases, and if also his gods—whoever they might be—had gifted him with prophetic vision, what play he could have made with the age-long argument about the original goodness of man's nature!

The successive participants in this searching debate were mostly men of outstanding ability, but the strokes and counter-strokes have a certain sameness which tends to make the recital of them a tedious one. The first in the field was Mencius (372-289 B.C.) who, following up some germinal ideas bequeathed by Confucius about man's nature, came out with the confident assertion that this nature was good. His proof was the clear presence in man's mind of inborn promptings which were obviously good—the fine feelings of pity, of shame, of deference or respect,

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to be sure which passages in *Chuang Tzŭ* were actually the work of Chuang Chou, but the language and style of those dealing with the theory of argument suggest they were his.



and of right and wrong. And the whole duty of man, as he saw it, was to nourish these feelings and bring them into flower ; for they were no other than the seeds of the virtues—of *Jên*, *I*, *Li* and *Chih*—which stood for Goodness and were the gracious attributes of “the gentleman”. Armed at all points to defend this doctrine, Mencius had more than one opportunity of doing so ; apart from the “whirling water” argument—his refutation of the theory of Kao Tzū that man’s nature was indifferent to good and bad—he had to deal with people who said the nature could be made good or made bad, and with others who said there were good natures and bad natures.

Not many years after the death of Mencius this doctrine of his was reversed by Hsün Tzū : a great Confucian, whose web of thought was wide enough to include not only orthodox but also Legalist, Mohist and Taoist ideas. While believing firmly in the excellence of the virtues, he denied their presence, even as seeds, in the congenital nature of man, which was bad ; what seeds there were in that bad nature were evil ones—those of profit-seeking, of envy and hate, of “lusts of the ear and eye”. The virtues, the grand correctives of the nature, not being in-born had to be added from without : as Hsün Tzū put it, in his essay on the subject<sup>1</sup>—“The goodness in man is acquired [artificial, man-made].” If this was heresy (as in Sung times the Neo-Confucians considered it to be), the practical side of his doctrine of the nature—his plan for taming and training it through culture, for beautifying it through *Li* (ritual)—was orthodox enough. But there were authoritarian tendencies in Hsün Tzū, which link his name with that of his pupil, Han Fei ; the latter, however, and his co-thinkers of the Legalist

<sup>1</sup> The genuineness of this famous essay, the twenty-third in the *Book of Hsün Tzū*, has been called in question. See R. F. Johnston, *Confucianism and Modern China* (1934), p. 210.

school went much further, discarding goodness in the Confucian sense as a rectifier of the congenitally bad nature, and substituting the firm discipline of *Fa* (law).

The controversy, which had always had an air of unreality about it, tended to become more academic as time went on. According to the Confucian Tung Chung-shu (died about 104 B.C.) the congenital nature had goodness in it, but there was the germ of covetousness to be taken into account and it was wrong to say, as Mencius did, that the nature itself was wholly good; as to the method of making it wholly good, Tung Chung-shu—much like Hsün Tzū—emphasized the value of *Chiao* (teaching, culture). A century or so later Yang Hsiung, taking up a middle position between those of Mencius and Hsün Tzū, argued—not, like Kao Tzū, that the nature was neither good nor bad—but that it was a mixture of good and bad, and that its development either way depended on *Ch'i*, the “passion-nature” (body of propensities). Much later still (about A.D. 800) the great Han Yü, a prince and pattern of Confucian culture, gave his views; dividing the nature into three grades—thoroughly good, good and bad, thoroughly bad—he criticized Mencius, Hsün Tzū and Yang Hsiung for dealing only with the middle grade, and accused contemporaries, who differed from himself, of borrowing Taoist and Buddhist ideas. Again much later (in the twelfth century A.D.) Chu Hsi, the perfecter of Neo-Confucianism, argued that, since the nature was *Li*<sup>1</sup> and *Li* was good, the nature was good, and that like a pearl in a bowl of dirty water it remained good despite the becloudings of *Ch'i*<sup>2</sup>; there were coteries of Confucians,

<sup>1</sup> Not *Li* in its universal form, but the *Li* of humanity inherent in the individual. See Note I (1).

<sup>2</sup> The physical endowment; “clear” in the sages, “turbid” in varying degrees in ordinary men. It was the duty of the latter by self-cultivation

however, both during and after Chu Hsi's time, who disputed and drastically revised some of his findings on the subject.

What a world of difference—that between this clamour of conflicting views and verdicts and the still, small voice of Taoism, on the problem of man's nature ! Actually, as the Taoists saw it, it was no problem ; the whole truth about man's nature was that it was born of *Tao*, and there could be no question of calling it good or bad, for in common with its great progenitor it transcended such predicates. All arguments, therefore, about its being this or that were ill-founded and irrelevant ; as to artificial methods, like that proposed by Mencius, of righting it when it went wrong, the point was that, if only man were left to himself, it could not go wrong—his *Té*, the " power " of *Tao* in him, would look after that.

to dispel this turbidity and so let shine the pearl of goodness in the nature, the purity of *Li*.

#### XIV. THE SILENCE OF HEAVEN

It may seem curious that the Taoists, to whom *Tao*—the spontaneity of the universe—was everything, should have found room in their scheme of thought for *T'ien*, the immemorial "Heaven" of China. But *T'ien* had largely shed its old-time sense of assembly of important men, of shades of the departed sage-kings in council; it had come to mean, when not used merely to denote the overarching sky, a spiritual power, a Providence or Grace, in high control of the deeds and destinies of mankind. And while Heaven conceived as a "body of people" would have seemed too naïve to the thinkers of Taoism, it was otherwise with the abstract idea of a providential power; the *Tê* of the *Tao Tê Ching*, in fact, was in one of its aspects just such a power,<sup>1</sup> and the Heaven of that work, a Heaven which the author describes as taking its law from *Tao*, was really only the Providence of *Tê* in another form. It must not be supposed, however, that the Taoists attached any clear-cut meaning to *T'ien*; on the contrary, the term was an elastic one capable of being applied—as it was in *Chuang Tzŭ*, like *Tao* in the *Tao Tê Ching* though less impersonally than that—to the First Principle itself.

The Taoists would not have it that there was purpose in the universe, and the "Way of Heaven" in Taoism was more a form of order than any sort of plan; the *T'ien* of the Confucians, on the other hand, had its aim—the establishment on earth of the moral law—and its use of chosen men (of whom Confucius was one) as instruments for the furtherance of that

<sup>1</sup> See Note III.

aim. In the Confucian classics *T'ien* has shades of meaning, which include "the sky", "a ruling power", "fate", "nature" and "a moral power"; in the Four Books all of these are reflected, but more particularly the second and fifth, and much is made of the Will of Heaven and its righteous biddings, the heavenly mandate or "Decree". This Heaven, though treated with a certain special intimacy by Confucius himself, was never personal in the sense in which Shang Ti, the object of Imperial worship, was; there are signs, indeed, of a tendency in Confucius to equate Heaven with the order of Nature, a tendency which grew in Confucianism as time went on. In *Mencius* Heaven, conceived in the main on traditional lines as a Providence with a Will, appears in places as a determinant force or law; a half century later, in *Hsün Tzŭ* with its strong colouring of Taoist thought, the term *T'ien*, completely depersonalized, has the one meaning of "Nature" (or "Nature's Law").

A similar merging of Confucian with Taoist ideas took place in connection with *T'ien Ti*, a general expression for "Heaven and Earth", which could mean, according to the mind of the user, the universe in a physical sense (the visible heaven and solid earth) or—a later development, this—the Powers of Nature conceived as a sublime duality. It is often difficult to know which meaning of *T'ien Ti*, or of *T'ien*, is intended; one thing is clear, however, namely, the conviction of Taoists and Confucians alike that neither *T'ien* nor *T'ien Ti* had "spoken" (disclosed its truth by revelation to mankind). In the *Tao Tê Ching* it is said of *T'ien* that its *Tao* (or Way) is "not to speak"; and in *Chuang Tzŭ* the same habit of divine reticence is ascribed to *T'ien Ti*, the Four Seasons being cited as a case of vital workings of Nature which are also voiceless. In the *Analects*, in language curiously similar to that of the passage in *Chuang Tzŭ*, Confucius, defending his "preference for not speaking",

calls attention to the silence of T'ien<sup>1</sup>; that silence is featured in *Mencius*, too, and there are later echoes of the same idea, applied to T'ien Ti and T'ien respectively, in the work of Hsün Tzū and that of Tung Chung-shu.

What, then, of Shang Ti,<sup>2</sup> the personal counterpart of impersonal T'ien in the Confucian classics, who was stated in the *Book of Poetry* to have "spoken" thrice directly to King Wên, and in the *History* to have given out the lesson of the Royal Way? A Confucian would never have thought of applying the test of higher criticism to these statements, of asking whether, perhaps, the one was no more than a flight of poetic fancy, the other merely a pious attribution to the Lord of All of a man-made plan; the records about Shang Ti, though slight, were part of the precious "tradition of the ancients" and, as such, had to be accepted and venerated as they stood. But the divinity that shaped Confucian ends was primarily T'ien and not Shang Ti, and for purposes of the orthodoxy of the Four Books (in which Shang Ti is hardly mentioned) it was enough to say that T'ien had not spoken: any breaking of silence by Shang Ti was little to the point.

And the point was this, that the truth of things could be known without a divine revelation—could be known directly by the holy sages, possessors of the gift and grace of intuition, and indirectly through them by ordinary men. The latter, whether Confucians or Taoists, had but to follow the leading of their sages, and something more than the mere silence of Heaven, of Heaven and Earth, would be surely theirs.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Waley considers (*The Analects of Confucius*, 1938, p. 42) that the translation "Nature", instead of "Heaven", for T'ien in this passage would not be out of place. Dr. Creel thinks the passage is probably a Taoist intrusion (*Confucius the Man and the Myth*, 1951, p. 213).

<sup>2</sup> Or Ti, "God" as distinct from "Supreme God".

## XV. DEATH AND BEYOND

THE comparative study of Confucianism and Taoism is mainly one of differences of attitude, larger or smaller, towards great subjects, and among the larger is the difference of attitude towards death. So far as the religious side is concerned, death was caught and held by the Confucian school in a complex web of traditional forms—of multifarious ritual acts of reverence to the endless chain of ancestral shades. But in Taoism religious beliefs meant little and ritual pieties nothing at all, and when the Taoist Fathers came, as they often did, to speak of death, they treated the subject as a philosophic, not a religious, one.

The early Confucians, intent like their Master on fostering morals in the field of life, made no attempt to propound a philosophy of death. Other leaders of thought were less reserved; Mo Ti, for instance, came boldly out with arguments on the efficacy of sacrifice to spirits of the dead. But Confucius had said, in answer to a disciple curious about the condition of the dead, that "until one knew life, one could not know death", and no true adherent of his could ignore this warning. Later on there were so-called Confucians who did ignore it: Wang Ch'ung, for instance, of the first century A.D., who, taking up the much-debated question of whether the dead were conscious, arrived at the definite conclusion that they were not.

The Taoist thinkers, though never giving formal shape to their views on death, made certain clear-cut general points about it. Among these was the metaphysical point that life and death, as members of a pair of opposites, could not be other than

unreal<sup>1</sup>; they had only to be looked at in the light of *Tao*, the all-transcending Reality, and the fancied difference between them would fade and disappear. It was the same when they were considered objectively, as facts of experience; the round of Nature with its seasons and other recurrent changes was manifestly one, and the cycle of change called life-and-death, within that round, was likewise one. And since this was so, it would be wrong for a Taoist to be elated about life or depressed about death; there must be one attitude towards them both—an unemotional acceptance, in quietness of spirit, of the chances of life and the certainty of death.

The last of these points is clearly brought out by the author (or authors) of *Chuang Tzū* in passages which are among the finest in Taoist literature; in that, for instance, which deals with Chuang Tzū's reactions on the death of his wife—his temporary yielding to natural grief, and then his realization that death was no more than a phase in the Evolution of Things. There are the cases, too, where Confucius is made to deprecate lamentation for the dead: a travesty, this, of his real attitude towards mourning. Emphatically, death was not an occurrence to be wept over. It was one to be faced and embraced, to be mystically welcomed; for, as Chuang Tzū once came to learn in a dream-talk with a human skull, there was more in death than mere repose for the tired body and the troubled mind—there was something positive, a "happiness greater than a king's".<sup>2</sup>

Precisely what this happiness meant, it is difficult to say. The references to after-death in *Chuang Tzū* are plentiful enough, but when examined they are seen to be just scraps of thought

<sup>1</sup> See Note VIII.

<sup>2</sup> A parallel story about Lieh Tzū and a skull is told in *Chuang Tzū* and also, in an extended form, in *Lieh Tzū*.



(some of them, doubtless, products of different minds and times) which have no clear outline, no intelligible pattern. Behind them is the broad idea of an incorporeal "essence" in man, which sometimes in the case of a man of *Tao* is rather curiously called his "heaven"; an indestructible, a god-like essence, which in one passage is symbolized by the "fire" that, when the "faggots" (the body) are consumed, appears to die but actually departs elsewhere. The play made with the idea, however, is confusing. In one of the essays a hint is given of a transformation after death, when the left arm may become a cock, the right a crossbow, the spirit a horse; in another it is argued that the spirit of man, which is real, survives eternally as such, while his body, which is unreal, suffers extinction. In some chapters death is applauded as a purely natural return to non-being; in others there is praise for cults of longevity, the aim of which was to postpone—it might even be to cancel—that ultimate journey.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the happiness of death was simply the peace of *Tao* enjoyable here and now, continued after death and carried to a higher power. It would be in line with the general drift of thought in *Chuang Tzū* to interpret it in this way.

<sup>1</sup> This is illustrated by the case of a Taoist sage who cultivated longevity with such effect that after twelve hundred years he was still alive and "going strong", with his body undecayed.

In *Lieh Tzū*, which emphasizes the repose of death, techniques for prolonging life are frowned on.

## XVI. PROBLEM OF THE YANG CHU FRAGMENT

As previously noted, it is a feature of the collection of Taoist writings known as *Chuang Tzŭ* that the anonymous authors, though broadly of one mind, on some points held independent views.<sup>1</sup> A comparable, but much sharper, cleavage of thought is observable in the collection *Lieh Tzŭ*, which presents—in the seventh (penultimate) chapter, purporting to contain the theories of Yang Chu<sup>2</sup>—a pattern of doctrine so extreme that the term "Taoism" seems a misnomer as applied to it. There is no clear answer to the question of how this chapter came to be included in *Lieh Tzŭ*; the thoroughgoing hedonism attributed to Yang Chu had no counterpart in Taoism proper, and in so far as it was a "following of Nature", it was so only in a narrow, un-Taoistic sense.

The impression given by the Yang Chu chapter is that of a mind of coarser grain than those of the acknowledged Masters of Taoism, working at a lower philosophic level than theirs: a mind indifferent to transcendentals—to speculations about *Tao* and *T'ê*—but deeply interested in "nurturing the life" (perfecting the individual self) on this-worldly lines. In general tone and temper the chapter is less benign than the rest of *Lieh Tzŭ*; Confucius, for instance, the treatment of whom elsewhere in the book is remarkable for its mildness, is here referred to (with some of his favourite hero-saints) in terms of pitying contempt.

<sup>1</sup> As, for instance, on the subject of government. See Note VI.

<sup>2</sup> Or the Yang Chu school. It is impossible to distinguish the original teachings of the master from the advanced Yang Chuism in which they are caught up.

It must not be supposed, however, that there is nothing of true Taoism in the philosophy of Yang Chu; on the contrary, important elements of his thought are paralleled in passages of the *Tao Tê Ching*, of *Chuang Tzŭ* and of the other chapters of *Lieh Tzŭ*. But in their final form as a message to the world—a plea for pleasurable and contented living based on satisfaction of the senses—the views of Yang Chu are, in effect, a repudiation and reversal of the higher Taoism.

In the *Tao Tê Ching* there are one or two (somewhat cryptic) allusions to "nurturing the life", but the emphasis here is on keeping intact the powers of the body considered as a tabernacle of *Tao*. There is no suggestion or hint of man's being born with these powers for purposes of enjoyment; the body is "what hurts"—a potential source of pain—and the first duty of the Taoist is to protect its *Tao*-given constitution from impairment through pain. Especially he must protect it from the ills attendant on over-indulgence of the organs of sense: from blinding of the eyes by the five colours, deafening of the ears by the five notes of music, spoiling of the palate by the five pleasurable tastes. So, too, he must put himself on guard against excitements of the mind: those caused, for instance, by hunting and racing, laying up treasures of bronze and jade, going about "with sharp swords and in rich array". As to methods of overcoming these mischiefs, the author recommends the practice of "desirelessness", *Wu-yü*; he also recommends—presumably for those not strong-willed enough to achieve *Wu-yü*—"reducing or making few the desires", *Kua-yü*.

The proper use of the senses and the mind is a frequent topic in *Chuang Tzŭ*, where it is treated in various ways reflecting, no doubt, the views of different contributors to this work. According to a passage in the eleventh essay, the "eight joys"—those of vision, hearing, the four virtues, music and know-

ledge—are harmless if exercised along purely natural lines ; but in fact men idolize and overdo them, thereby disrupting the peace of the world, and the aim of the wise ruler should be to restore that peace by a return to *Wu-wei* (inaction). In the eighteenth essay, the opening section of which is devoted to an analysis of "enjoyment", the writer allows that comforting the body with the luxuries of life may constitute enjoyment ; he emphasizes, however, that his own preference is for the high satisfaction resulting from *Wu-wei*—the perfect enjoyment of the Taoist, which is the absence of enjoyment. In the twenty-fourth essay a special point is made of the "menace" of the sense-organs and the mind : the menace, that is to say, which the eye presents to its own power of vision, the ear to its own power of hearing, and so on. There is no direct reference in any of these passages to Yang Chu : elsewhere, however (as in the tenth essay), the sense-philosopher is coupled with Mo Ti, the lonely advocate of "universal love", in a denunciation of these two as despoilers of "The Way".<sup>1</sup>

Where the same subject is dealt with in *Lieh Tzŭ* (apart from the seventh, Yang Chu, chapter) there are similar invocations of eternal principles. Thus, in one of the metaphysical sections, the phenomena of sound, colour and taste are stated to have their hidden origins in *Wu-wei* : a warning, it would seem, to the possessor of the senses, on which these phenomena impinge, to treat the latter reverentially as functions of *Wu-wei*. Again, in the story of the Yellow Emperor's dream, the "way of the senses" is firmly declared to be not the way to the attainment of *Tao* ; what the author recommends is "fasting of the mind", a form of self-discipline (met with also in *Chuang*

<sup>1</sup> So also Mencius, from his Confucian standpoint, bracketed in condemnation these two philosophers, making the same clamant appeal as the writer in *Chuang Tzŭ* to "stop the mouths of Yang and Mo".

*Tzū*) designed to make room in the mind for *Tao*.<sup>1</sup> In other contexts the faculties of sense are so played down that they all but disappear: in the account, for instance, of the final stage of Lieh Tzū's nine years' quest of *Tao*, when, having achieved Inward Vision (*Ming*) otherwise than through particular senses, he found that "his eyes were one and the same with his ears, his ears with his nose, his nose with his mouth". No aspersions are cast, as in *Chuang Tzū*, on Yang Chu by name; where he is mentioned at all—in occasional anecdotes—the attitude towards him is a friendly one, but in these cases it is probably the man, rather than the master-philosopher, who is spoken about.

The main idea in these various approaches to the complex problem of the senses and the mind—the idea of so controlling these latter as not to involve them in *Wei* (action)—is sharply countered in the Yang Chu chapter of *Lieh Tzū*. The author of that chapter in a famous passage—a call, strange-sounding in a Taoist work, to enjoyment for enjoyment's sake—urges, apparently with no thought of *Wu-wei*, that the heart of man should take its fill of all life's cultural pleasures and comfortable things. There is no suggestion here of reducing the desires (*Kua-yü*), still less of abolishing them (*Wu-yü*). At certain points important tenets of Taoism proper are actually reversed: as where the author invites "the mouth" to regale itself with talk about right and wrong, a form of "action" which was anathema to all true Taoists.<sup>2</sup> The presence of such heterodox elements in the chapter is matched by the absence from it of other-worldly sanctions: in particular, of any higher sanction for its central doctrine of "ease and pleasure" than the hard fact of the shortness of the span of human life.

Yet one finds in the chapter antipathies and sympathies which

<sup>1</sup> See Note IX.

<sup>2</sup> See Note VIII.

were also those of the Masters of Taoism—a deep distaste for conventional virtue, an eager acceptance of “nature” as the principle of man’s Way. The foundation, however, was one thing and the superstructure another; and it is the countenancing of the latter with its ultra-hedonism by the unknown compilers of *Lieh Tzŭ*, which constitutes the riddle that has puzzled all students of this work.

## XVII. TAOISM AND ZEN

WHEN the flowering time of Taoism was over and its pure philosophy, in a process helped and hastened by infiltrations from Buddhism, went to seed in a Taoist religion, it looked as if all was up with the philosophy for ever. But the Buddhists in their turn were borrowers from Taoism, and in the form of Buddhism known as *Ch'an*—or more commonly nowadays as *Zen*, the Japanese equivalent of *Ch'an*—some of the main ideas of Taoism, modified to fit the pattern of *Zen*, were given a sort of vicarious immortality. It is not always easy to distinguish these elements in *Zen*; there were certain affinities between Chinese Taoist and Indian Buddhist modes of thought, and where these two converged, as in *Zen*, the result was a mixture, or rather a compound, of ideas. Cases in point are the concepts of "emptiness" and "inaction"; held in common, though differently understood, by Indians on the one hand and Taoists on the other, they figure in *Zen* as syntheses—part Buddhist, part Taoist. On "contemplation", which was a feature of both obediences, the *Zen* masters quarrelled among themselves; while they all accepted it in principle, there were those who could not tolerate its extreme forms (where the flow of consciousness was retarded or brought to a stop).

Like all other schools of Chinese philosophy, the *Zen* school had its *Tao* or Way, which, although essentially Buddhist, is often described in the curious literature of *Zen* in terms and turns of phrase reminiscent of Taoism. Thus when Ma-tsu, of the eighth century A.D., inquired of his Zen master how, if the *Tao* was formless, it could be seen into, and whether it was subject to construction and destruction, the colloquy had all

the appearance of one between an old-time Taoist pupil and master. The fact was that, at their highest levels, the two *Taos* (those of Taoism and *Zen*) tended to lose their differences and to become one; with the result that, when they came to be described, the same kind of abstract language was applicable to them both. While the presence in *Zen* texts of Taoistic epithets and expressions is interesting for this reason, it does not necessarily connote a recourse (in the sense of actual borrowing) to Taoism; the *Tao* of *Zen*, which was that of Buddhahood or Enlightenment or rather Sudden Enlightenment (for this was the special mark of *Zen*), had quite enough native strength to be independent of the *Tao* of the *Tao Tê Ching* and *Chuang Tzŭ*.

The idea of "emptiness"—a basic one in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the mother-school of *Zen*—was given a special place in the central *Zen* doctrine of "seeing into one's self-nature".<sup>1</sup> By self-nature was meant the real, the original, nature "even before one was born" (born, that is, into a world of relativity); and part of the *Zen* "drill" for seeing into (intuitively apprehending) this nature, was to clear the mind of its clutter of relative knowledge, to bring it to a state of "no mind" or "no thought". This mind-emptying, portrayed in the Oxherding Pictures of *Zen*<sup>2</sup> by a blank circle, at once recalls the Taoist technique of "fasting of the mind" referred to in *Chuang Tzŭ* and *Lieh Tzŭ*<sup>3</sup>; in both cases it was the same

<sup>1</sup> The first *Zen* master to formulate this doctrine was Hui-nêng (died 713 A.D.), the so-called Sixth Patriarch and the real Chinese founder of *Zen*.

<sup>2</sup> This famous sequence of ten pictures—a sort of pilgrim's progress in *Zen*—is believed to date from the Sung dynasty (eleventh century A.D.).

<sup>3</sup> See Note IX.



great matter of fitting the mind for the supreme experience—in *Zen* the realization of Buddhahood, in Taoism that of *Tao*.

The principle of "inaction", which like that of "emptiness" was fundamental in the Mahāyāna scheme, suggests, in its practical application in *Zen*, an intimate blending of Buddhist and Taoist ideas. There was the same aversion in *Zen* as in Taoism to conventional modes and processes of thought, the same insistence on "naturalness in living" as the outward and visible expression of the real; in both cases, too, the ideal life envisaged was a simple one, backed by a sense of awareness of the wonder of it all.

I draw water, I carry fuel.  
What a miracle, this!

In these words of an eighth-century *Zen* poet, with their intimation of something sacramental in the performance of the humblest tasks, the "inaction" of *Zen*—and with it the *Wu-wei* of ancient Taoism—is illustrated and epitomized; for "inaction", which meant "no *unreal* action", also meant "*real* (that is, natural) action",<sup>1</sup> and of this the simple drawing of water, the simple carrying of fuel, were perfect examples.

The experience called Sudden Enlightenment in *Zen* was something elemental, that shook the whole being of a man; for "seeing into self-nature" involved no less than a "leap" from the world of relativity to another world, the world as it really was. Of the actual experience at the moment of crisis no man could tell, for it was inexpressible; this only could be said, that the "seeing" from the new viewpoint thus reached was no ordinary seeing, but absolute seeing in which there was neither seer nor seen. In so far as the experience was "sudden", it was a speciality of *Zen*; but mystical insight,

<sup>1</sup> As to the full significance of these expressions, see Note V.

such as this, was not the prerogative of any one school, and there is something analogous to Zen Enlightenment in the Taoist doctrine, proffered in *Chuang Tzŭ*, of self-withdrawal to the "Tao axis" of thought.<sup>1</sup> The scope of Zen insight, however, was wider than that of *Chuang Tzŭ*, for it covered not only a realization of the unity in multiplicity of things, but a knowledge of what things were in their self-nature.<sup>2</sup>

As already mentioned, there was a difference of opinion in the Zen school about *Dhyāna* (meditation): about whether it should be practised statically, on lines of quietistic absorption, or, as Hui-nêng taught, dynamically—that is, as high-powered concentration on "pointers" (utterances) of Zen masters. The former method, that of a small group only, has a special interest in relation to Taoism; for it represents a return, from India, of the art of "sitting with an empty mind", which had previously flowered in the Taoist field from what was mainly, if not wholly, a Chinese stem.<sup>3</sup> The actual terms of Taoism used to describe this art reappear in Zen, even when it is the dynamic method that is being dealt with; such phrases, for instance, as "making oneself like cold ashes or dead wood" hark straight back to the accounts of trance in *Chuang Tzŭ*.<sup>4</sup> But there is no parallel in Taoism to the ultra-active *Dhyāna* advocated by Hui-nêng and finally adopted, as true *Dhyāna*,

<sup>1</sup> See Note VIII.

<sup>2</sup> That the Taoists had thought about self-nature is clear from the well-known saying in *Chuang Tzŭ*, which is paralleled in the *Tao Tê Ching*, that "it is not by enumerating the parts of a horse [that is, by considering it intellectually] that one gets to know what a horse is". But the idea was not developed in Taoism, though there is something not unlike it mixed up in the doctrine of *Tê*—see Note III.

<sup>3</sup> As to possible Indian influence on early Taoist practices of the Yoga type, see Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (1934), pp. 114-15.

<sup>4</sup> See Note IX.

by the main body of adherents to *Zen*; the Taoists were all against agitation, and it was just this—violent rousing of the mind—that made *Zen* “meditation” the unique thing it was.

Like Taoism, *Zen* was a Wisdom of No Words, which in practice meant using the fewest possible words and discarding these as soon as their purpose had been served; that purpose being merely to “point the way”, not to try to explain the unexplainable—in the one case, *Tao*, in the other, Self-nature or Buddha-nature. But the *Zen* masters outdid the Taoists in this; whereas, for instance, the latter used “*Tao*” as a word for what was beyond all words, the former would not mention the Buddha-name, which, though all-excelling, was still a word with the hateful taint of relativity adhering to it.<sup>1</sup> And it was easier for them to dispense with words, because they had other methods, unknown in Taoism, of bringing, of forcing, home the truth—a blow, a gesture, an exclamation, apparently nonsensical but quick to shake or shatter the pupil’s faith in what the world called sense. As to written words, of which there were plenty in *Zen*, the position was the same as in Taoism; having pointed the way, they were so much “junk” and could be finally cast aside, or better still (as was done by some *Zen* masters) burnt.

It has been said of Chuang Tzū, the prince of Taoists, that he “seemed to be almost Buddhist before Buddhism arrived”<sup>2</sup>; it could likewise be said of his special doctrine of “great knowledge”<sup>3</sup> that it was almost *Zen*—that it was wholly *Zen*, in

<sup>1</sup> There was a tendency at times in the history of *Zen* to make use in meditation of the “Pure Land” practice of constantly reciting Amitabha Buddha’s name. But this was held in check and never went so far as to affect the essential spirit of *Zen*.

<sup>2</sup> F. Harold Smith, *The Buddhist Way of Life* (1951), p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> See Note VIII.

fact, so far as it predicated an all-embracing unity behind things. But *Zen* "knowledge" was richer in content than its counterpart in Taoism; for it included an acceptance of the world of plurality, of the objective world as it had always been, yet fraught (as a result of the vision gained in Sudden Enlightenment) with a new meaning and validity. Such two-pronged knowledge, as it might be termed, was peculiar to *Zen*; this did not, however, prevent the *Zen* masters from using the language of Taoism about it, from calling it a "return to the origin", a "going home".

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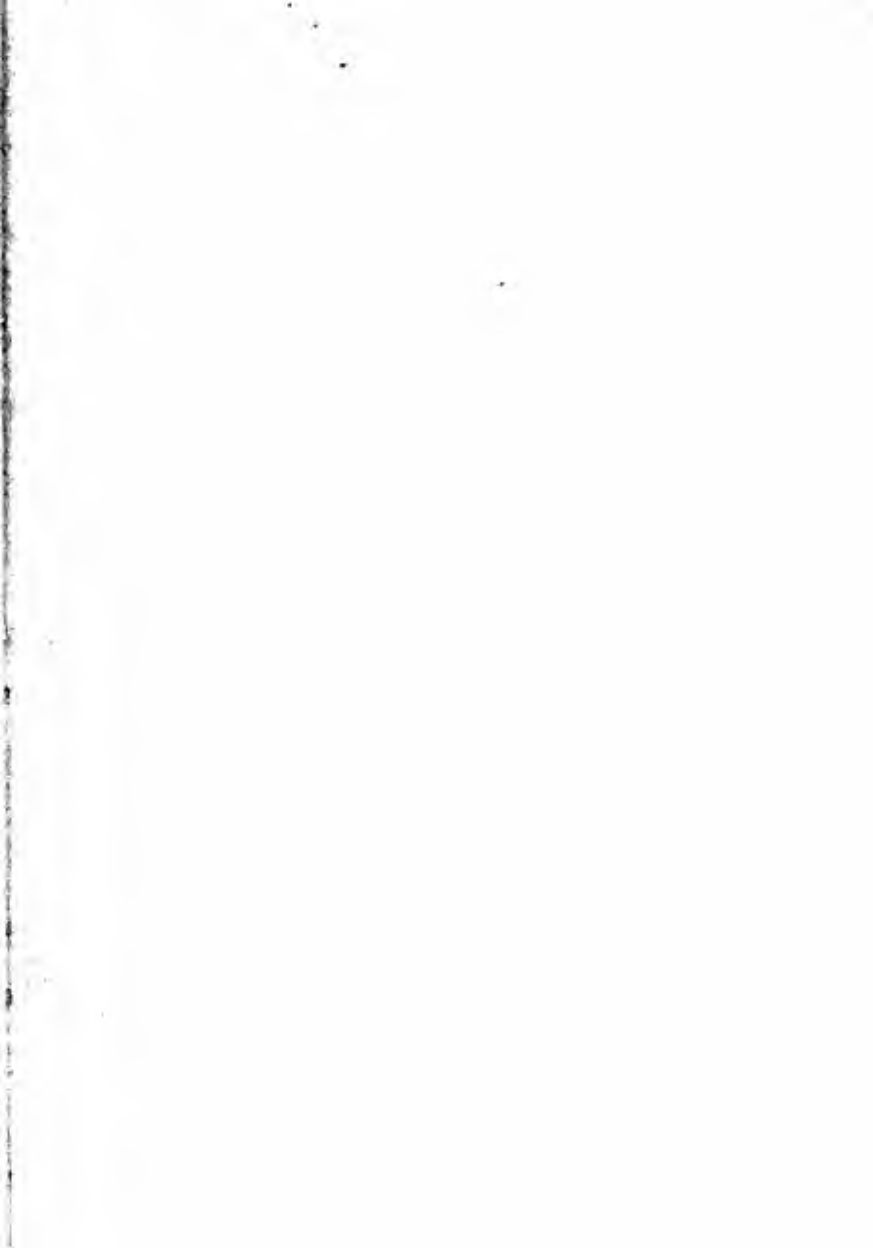
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